

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IAM DISTRICT LODGE 776 IN  
FORT WORTH, TEXAS, 1942-1946: A CASE STUDY  
IN THE GROWTH OF ORGANIZED LABOR  
DURING WORLD WAR II

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE NATIONAL LABOR MOVEMENT DURING WORLD WAR II.....	11
3. DISTRICT LODGE 776 BEGINNINGS: 1942 TO 1943.....	54
4. STRUGGLING TO SECURE THE UNION AND THE CONTRACT: JANUARY 1944 TO SUMMER 1944.....	73
5. IMPLEMENTING THE CONTRACT: SUMMER 1944 TO SPRING 1945....	95
6. THE END OF THE WAR AND THE INITIAL POSTWAR CONFLICTS: MAY 1945 TO 1946.....	111
7. POLITICS AND POLITICAL ACTION DURING THE WAR.....	124
8. CONCLUSION.....	140
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	145

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Historians attempting to understand the modern labor movement have most often looked to the 1930s when the New Deal “Revolution” laid the basis for modern America and organized labor emerged as one of the leading powers in American society. The New Deal years have gained more attention from labor historians than any comparable time period for good reason. Prior to the New Deal organized labor had not been a very significant force. Concern over labor relations arose mostly because the “labor question” was one of the most salient and important problems in post-Civil War America. The government, the business community, middle class and other reformers, and unorganized workers understood the significance of working peoples’ actions and conditions in a modern industrial economy. They, as well as organized labor, kept labor issues in the forefront of social thought and corporate and government policy.

Only during the New Deal did the labor movement become the most important single force in changing and affecting the condition of working people, especially those in unions. This is not to say that other factors—the condition of the economy, the government, business, reformers, and others—did not continue to have a decisive impact on labor. In fact, business never lost its reign over the economy, and the government continued to protect this power. Yet capital certainly had its influence curbed during the

New Deal as the government intruded into activities previously believed to be largely outside the domain of federal involvement. One of these areas was in the relations between capital and labor. Although it should be understood that working people and union leaders built their unions themselves, government protection of their activities was crucial. Given such fortuitous circumstances—a weakened business class, a supportive government, an awakened and active working class—unions flourished, and the limits of their growth and power were as yet unknown. This, the birth of the modern labor movement and the uncertainty as to how it would mature, has focused attention on the 1930s.

In order to understand why the modern labor movement took the form it did in the United States, one must also look to the important years during World War II. Unions came out of the war years moving toward the form they presently retain. Unions further transformed into centralized, bureaucratic institutions in which officials in the national offices accumulated more power and influence over their membership. Rank-and-file members became increasingly marginalized, and local officials were expected to be extremely loyal to their national leaders. The factors that were so crucial to the success of the labor movement in the 1930s, those elements that perhaps remain as seminal and unique phenomena in American labor history—massive rank-and-file and leadership activism in the workplace, the political arena, and the community, that is, social movement union practice, as well as a decent measure of local autonomy—were being reduced in importance by the end of the war. Another feature of the modern labor

movement that was reinforced by the war years was a strong and seemingly unseverable connection to the Democratic party, as opposed to independent working-class politics. Unionists also accomplished a great deal by the end of the war. They had organized nearly a third of the non-agricultural workforce and had a very strong presence in the mass-production industries among other locations in the economy. This provided unions with a considerable amount of economic and political power and helped create one of the highest standards of living in world history for Americans in the post-WWII era.

In spite of the importance of the WWII years for understanding the modern labor movement, this period has not received the scholarly attention by historians that it deserves. In 1953 Joel Seidman wrote the first full-length treatment of labor during the war, *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion*.<sup>1</sup> Seidman interpreted labor history during these years much in the way other liberal scholars have done with the New Deal years. Seidman viewed unions sympathetically and interpreted the advances made during the war years as greatly beneficial and with few drawbacks. He also believed that the interests of union leaders and members mostly coincided with the interests of other groups who formed the liberal wing of the New Deal coalition.

The next major treatment of the war years came in 1982 with *Labor's War at Home* by Nelson Lichtenstein. He built on Seidman's and other liberal scholars' work,

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). For a fuller discussion of labor historiography, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Cambridge:



and he was influenced by New Left scholars—who attacked liberal scholars and liberal thought generally—and other radical writings. Achieving prominence during the social and political upheavals of the 1960s when unions were no longer at the forefront of progressive forces in the United States, New Left scholars argued that during the New Deal and later the federal government, led by a group of liberal and enlightened corporate representatives and businessmen, sought to stabilize the economy by eliminating the radical potential of the labor movement through coopting the less-radical elements of labor into the New Deal coalition. Having succeeded in doing so by at least the end of the 1940s, liberal corporate interests had convinced labor willingly to participate in its own domination, according to New Left scholars.

Since the 1960s, liberals and others on the left have criticized this perspective as seriously flawed or too simplistic. The New Left, or “corporate liberal,” interpretation was seen as defective for several basic reasons. First, the vast majority of businessmen were against the government’s labor policies during the 1930s and World War II years. Furthermore, the notion that the federal government merely acted as a tool of the capitalist class largely has been discredited. Also, the federal government’s labor policies did not initially have a dampening effect on the labor movement. To the contrary, government actions facilitated the greatest upsurge of labor’s economic and political power in American history.

One scholar who attempted to reinterpret the history of the modern labor movement with these criticisms in mind was Nelson Lichtenstein. He used numerous studies, either more specialized or with a different focus, as well as his own research, to interpret the labor movement during WWII in a new way. Not so laudatory as the earlier liberals, and not so condemnatory as the New Left radicals, Lichtenstein created a more complex understanding of labor history. He analyzed the causes of labor's success while also looking for trends that eventually led unions to take a more conservative, cooperative, and conciliatory stance in relations with employers. Influenced by the ideas of radical Trotskyist laborites, who had criticized labor leaders during the war, Lichtenstein argued that the causes for the demise of labor's radical or progressive potential were rooted in the increased economic and political power that World War II accorded corporate interests, but, most importantly, in the abandonment of both social unionism<sup>2</sup> and the striving for serious social democratic reform by labor leaders, and the conservative effects of labor leaders' alliance with liberal Democrats, an alliance labor leaders thought necessary in order to protect unions from resistance and attacks by employers. Lichtenstein criticized labor leaders for not using rank-and-file militancy to reinforce social unionism and force social democratic change.

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<sup>2</sup> As was alluded to earlier, social unionism can be defined as grass-roots democratic activism by unionists, but also by others in the community and in coordination with them, to augment union and working-class democratic power in the workplace, the community, and in the political realm. For a discussion of these issues see Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988), xiii-xxi.

Affected by the social and intellectual climate of the 1960s and 1970s, and perhaps spurred on by the radical New Left, Lichtenstein's work pointed to a new trend in the work of labor historians. This trend was an attempt by scholars broadly associated with the left—liberals and radicals—to use advances in intellectual understandings of the economy, the state, the business community, the working class, the workplace, gender, race, community, and other areas to create a much less ideologically-driven and more “balanced” approach to labor history. One such scholar's work is Robert Zieger's *The CIO*.<sup>3</sup> While acknowledging many of the same forces affecting the labor movement during the war, Zieger is not so critical of labor leaders for the decisions they made. One of the main differences between Zieger's and Lichtenstien's histories is that Zieger thinks that the alternatives to the decisions labor leaders made were terribly risky at best and almost certain to fail. Zieger claims that Lichtenstein misunderstands certain fundamental circumstances of the war years. He states in a footnote in *The CIO*:

In the existing literature there is a tendency for historians to ignore or bypass a discussion of this vulnerability [exclusive reliance on shop-floor militancy]. Widespread shop-floor militancy is taken to be an unambiguous strength; the ignorance of defense mobilization bureaucrats and congressional critics of labor affairs is taken as somehow rendering them trivial or ineffectual; the powerful nonunion habits of the vast majority of the American working class are ignored; the widespread condemnation of defense strikes and skepticism of labor leaders and unions among blue collar people are unacknowledged.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 414, fn. 61.

Critiques such as Zieger's point to the forces working against implementation, most importantly in the workplace, of greater democratic controls and processes. Much of the dispute does seem to hinge on how one interprets the workplace actions of workers during the war. In *Labor's War at Home*, Lichtenstein discusses that in some places workers began to formulate strategies on how to organize outside the government-supervised labor relations system. But these occurred only in a scattering of places, and they do not characterize the overall quality of workplace actions by the vast majority of workers. Most wildcat strikes and other actions showed a determination by workers to ensure that they received fair treatment within the existing labor relations system, not a desire to seriously or fundamentally alter that system. Furthermore, many of those union leaders Lichtenstein and others criticize for giving up on social democracy and social unionism remained committed to reasonable forms of social democracy, democratic organization of the workplace, and democratic political activity.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis concentrates on a local union of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), District Lodge 776, of Fort Worth, Texas, during the war years. It uses the works of Seidman, Lichtenstein, Zieger, and others to describe the national labor movement during the war years.<sup>6</sup> This creates a context for understanding the actions of a

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<sup>5</sup> On these last few points, Lichtenstein and other radicals might agree and yet still maintain their criticisms. While such reasoning probably could be supported and justified, for a variety of reasons, this thesis will not explore these ideas further.

<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to include works that concentrate on the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), although this thesis is about an American Federation of Labor (AFL) union, for two reasons. First, some of the best histories on the World War II years

local union. While most of these works concentrate on national union leaders, this study will look at how local union leaders responded to the conditions of the war years. The interpretive viewpoint of this work fits closest to Zieger's writings on the labor movement during the war. It will emphasize how union leaders could remain genuinely committed to legitimate forms of economic and political democracy while at the same time more or less remaining loyal to the government's labor relations policies.

The main argument of the thesis will run along three lines. First, it will demonstrate that the experiences of the Fort Worth Machinists clearly fit into the national labor movement during the war years. This idea is important since scholars often have tried to find and emphasize the "distinctiveness" of Southern history, although this tendency is not quite so pronounced in histories of organized labor in the South. While this thesis will not try to argue that Southern labor history, especially in certain areas of the economy, is not unique in any way, it will emphasize the commonalties between labor unions in the South and those in the rest of the country.<sup>7</sup> Although there may have been a distinct South, and a somewhat distinctively separate political, economic, and social history for the ex-Confederate states, and therefore a distinct southern labor history, this different labor history was not quite so different in certain areas. The company that was

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concentrate on the CIO, and they discuss the labor movement as a whole as well as CIO unions; and second, because the experiences of IAM D. L. 776, as an industrial union, resemble those of CIO industrial unions during the war.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Robert Zieger's introduction to *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1945* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

located in Fort Worth, Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation (CVAC), and whose employees District Lodge 776 represented, was an example of such an area or sector in Southern society. This points toward causes of the distinct southern history, or at least it points to explanations or forces that reduced or lessened the “distinctiveness” of southern labor history. These issues lead to the next line of interpretation.

Second, this thesis will argue that the existence, survival, and strength of the union depended greatly on outside forces—an expanding national economy, a powerful national union, and a generally labor-friendly federal government. Some of the factors that decreased the South’s distinctiveness during the war were the presence of a national business and national union which were both regulated by the federal government. District Lodge 776’s experiences resembled those of other unions as described in the major histories of the period. Management’s resistance to District Lodge 776, shop-floor problems the union contended with, and the reliance of the union on the government for protection were all common to unions across the country. Federal government involvement in labor relations during the war was especially crucial to the local’s success. District Lodge 776 officials used the federal government to its advantage, and they saw it as the most practical and secure way of solving its most difficult problems. This last point will be emphasized since it has caused interpretive and evaluative debates among those scholars who have studied labor during the WWII years. Radical leftists tend to view this process as an integral element of the larger transformation of the main thrust of the labor movement from social movement unionism to modern business unionism. In other words,

radicals largely believe that this strategy by union leaders, the thinking that supported it, and the larger strategic vision of which these tactics were a part, especially indicates the turn away from social unionism toward business unionism that unions were taking by the end of the war. This thesis does not contribute significantly to this debate, except to emphasize the limited options union leaders—both at the national and local level—had when opting for the strategy they took.

Third, the thesis will show that union officers and active rank-and-file members used their bases of strength—the national economy, the national IAM, and the federal government—to build an effective local labor organization. The combined result of the actions of local and national businessmen, government officials, and unionists who affected CVAC employees during the war was a well-functioning local labor organization. While outside forces created fortuitous circumstances for a local union to thrive, the IAM experiment at CVAC's Fort Worth plant would have failed had it not been for the actions of CVAC employees themselves. Those workers who became an active part of the union leadership and rank and file built their own union, and a fairly successful one. That a local union cannot survive or flourish without local participation should be obvious. But it is a fact that should not be obscured or subsumed when trying to understand the history of the labor movement, especially in an era such as the WWII years when national forces played decisive roles.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NATIONAL LABOR MOVEMENT DURING WORLD WAR II

During World War II, American unionists continued their efforts to organize working-class people, and unions made substantial gains in membership, in coverage of collective bargaining agreements, and in economic and political power. While the labor movement reinvigorated itself during the New Deal years and showed much promise, most unions remained in a precarious position, and much of the core industrial workforce had not been organized. The transition of United States unions from a minor participant in economic and political affairs to a major force in American society began in the 1930s, but crucial and determinant experiences also occurred during the war years—roughly from 1940 to 1945. This chapter focuses on the main themes of the history of the national labor movement during World War II; and it also discusses the most significant factors that account for labor's becoming a potent national force.

United States involvement in WWII created two different circumstances that solidified unionization, notably in the mass-production industries. First, the stimulus the war gave to the economy—spending for defense and then war production—lifted the country out of depression and provided favorable conditions for the expansion of unions. Given the higher profits and manpower shortages, employers displayed less opposition to union drives by their employees and to their demand for collective bargaining contracts.



Still, employers exhibited various degrees of resistance to unions throughout the war. Second, the federal government intervened more directly in labor relations to ensure continued production and to reduce inflation, and in turn protected union activities, regulated labor relations, and preserved contractual gains. Government intervention forced strong antiunion employers to accept unions. Workers thus experienced the immediate benefits of union membership. The Roosevelt administration enforced union security measures and paved the way for the union shop in the postwar years. Labor and management, partly or mostly through force or threat of force by the government, learned how to deal with each other in relatively peaceful and stable ways. Labor leaders saw the opportunities available to them with these developments and attempted to expand and strengthen unions through organizational work and through political activism and pressure. With employer resistance lessened and government protections greatly expanded, these efforts met with much success. Union membership expanded from about 7 million in 1940 to about 13 million in 1945—which was nearly one-third of the non-agricultural workforce. More importantly, unions stood on firmer ground than at any previous time in American history. By the end of the war, organized labor had become a potent economic, political, and social force. This chapter accordingly identifies the most significant factors that account for these developments and the roles that unionists,

businessmen, and government officials played in the events that shaped the labor movement.<sup>8</sup>

Initial reactions to the war in Europe by labor leaders varied. Most trade union officials, both in the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, voiced strong isolationist tendencies and wanted the United States to stay out of the war, fearing a potential erosion of worker rights and living standards. While numerous labor leaders believed American involvement would give a boost to the economy, alleviate unemployment, and probably raise union numbers, they also thought these gains would be short-lived. Experience had shown them that a recession and loss of union members was sure to follow, as well as a strengthening of the forces that were hostile to the labor movement. Unionists had advocated government works programs, advanced social welfare legislation, and continuing union drives to deal with the economic woes. A number of labor leaders in 1939 had held official union posts in World War I and remembered the fallout after the war.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David Brody, "The Emergence of Mass-Production Unions," in *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 112-13; Daniel Nelson, *Shifting Fortunes: The Rise and Decline of American Labor, from the 1820s to the Present* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 121-22; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 192; Christopher Tomlins, "AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective," *Journal of American History* 65 (March 1979): 1023; Seidman, *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion*, 195, 248; On union membership numbers, if CIO claims are included, the numbers would be about 10 million in 1940 and 15 million in 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 27; Joel Seidman, *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion*, 20-22.

Other anti-Nazi unionists believed, however, that European countries should be helped against German aggression at whatever cost, and their arguments gained strength after Germany had taken control of most of the European continent, thus endangering American security. At that point AFL leaders gave strong support to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's call for a military buildup. United Mine Workers (UMW) President John L. Lewis and others in the CIO opposed any steps toward belligerency like the peacetime draft and the destroyers-for-bases deal, but they favored hemispheric defense and the buildup of strong unions as a bulwark against domestic fascism. Lewis also supported union organizing drives in the defense industries, but at the same time he feared that increasing the centralized power of the government would pose a threat to improving living standards and to political democracy. Conflicts over America's reaction to the war, and FDR's more moderate attitude toward conservatives after the 1938 elections, eventually led Lewis to outright opposition to the president's policies.<sup>10</sup>

Communist labor leaders at first supported Lewis, mostly due to the support they gave to the Soviet Union's foreign policy aims arising out of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Many union leaders in the CIO, though, came to accept views similar to those of Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) President Sidney Hillman, who supported FDR's policy of aid to the Allies and the defense buildup at home as the best way to destroy Nazism and protect American interests. He hoped these policies, as

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<sup>10</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 22-23; Philip Taft, *The A.F. of L. From the Death of Gompers to the Merger* (New York: Harper, 1959), 204-09.

well as strong political support for FDR and the Democrats, would bring organizational gains. All of the factions remained steadfast in denouncing the fascist regimes. Labor leaders were some of the earliest and most vocal critics of Germany's vicious attacks on trade unionists and Jews.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the administration developed strategies to deal with the demands of big business and labor during the defense buildup, and it set up planning agencies to coordinate the new economic activity. FDR needed the cooperation of big business for the massive increase in defense production and labor for industrial peace and political support. The power and influence of unions, however, remained subordinate to that of business within these government bodies. Most corporations converted slowly, however, from civilian production to defense production until certain guarantees on profits and other conditions were met.<sup>12</sup>

While the Roosevelt administration relied heavily on businessmen and corporate bureaucrats to fill the more important planning agency positions, most of these businessmen did not come from strong antiunion backgrounds. Much like General Motors executive William Knudson, a member of the National Defense Advisory Commission (NDAC), which was an early economic planning agency, most of the pro-business government bureaucrats were willing to tolerate unions while retaining as much management power as possible. FDR did appoint Sidney Hillman to a position on the

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<sup>11</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 28; Zieger, *The CIO*, 102-04.

<sup>12</sup> Harris, Howell John. *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 41.

NDAC with responsibilities that included dealing with employment and manpower problems, but Hillman and the labor leaders he brought in to the commission had little influence compared to that wielded by businessmen or government officials. Hillman more or less accepted this disparity without a fight, but opposition erupted among labor leaders over government contracts with violators of labor law and strong antiunion firms. Lewis and others wanted the government to withhold contracts from such companies, and they attacked Hillman for not pushing this matter. Although agency officials paid some lip service to these complaints, few results followed. The prevailing stance within the NDAC was that the government agencies should not use their power to enforce labor laws. Not able to persuade the government to use its new influences to uphold the basic labor protections, unionists had even less success promoting various industrial council plans. Walter Reuther, head of the United Automobile Workers' (UAW) GM division, and Phillip Murray, the president of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), proposed detailed outlines on how the government could set up industrial councils made up of business, labor, and public representatives that would direct the industrial economy. Business leaders and government officials rejected them as unworkable, and they clearly had no interest in letting labor become co-managers of corporate America.<sup>13</sup>

Despite labor's minor role in the defense agencies, union leaders continued to put most of their efforts into traditional organizing campaigns. From its inception in 1935, the

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<sup>13</sup> Harris, *The Right to Manage*, 41-43; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 26-30; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 175-77; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 36-42; Zieger, *The CIO*, 104-07.

CIO set out to unionize the mass-production industries, and it had made impressive gains in that area. Until 1941, however, the CIO remained an unstable institution with numerous financial, organizational, and membership problems. Although the CIO claimed 4 million members in 1940, the actual number of dues-paying members was probably about 2 million, with the UMW and the ACWA accounting for over 40 percent of the total. The UAW, SWOC, and the United Rubber Workers (URW) combined membership reached about 200,000, which was less than the ACWA total. The CIO continued to rely heavily on the UMW for financial and human resources.<sup>14</sup>

Numerous large firms still refused to recognize unions—“Little Steel” (those steel companies that were smaller and independent of U. S. Steel), Ford, Westinghouse, and Goodyear Tire and Rubber—and even corporations that had recognized unions—GM, Chrysler, Studebaker, General Electric, U. S. Steel—gave the unions few of their demands regarding wage increases, the union shop, or the right to bargain for all the workers on the shop floor. The AFL had a larger membership base with about 4.3 million dues-paying members in 1940, and its strength was in the skilled trades and the transportation and construction industries. Still, AFL unions had not made much progress in the major mass-production industries. If the labor movement was to become a major force in the American economy, this crucial sector had to be organized.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 95-96; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 171; Harris, *The Right to Manage*, 25-26; Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s,” 1022-23, 1034-38.

Labor's level of success in its organizing efforts depended on several factors, including changes in the economy and the reaction of employees, management, and government. The economy got a big boost when Congress repealed the arms embargo in the fall of 1939 and passed the Lend-Lease Act in the spring of 1941, and as the military and defense agencies contracted with companies for the military buildup. Since many corporations who received military orders were in the mass-production industries, production in the aircraft, auto, steel, machinery and other industries expanded, thus creating new employment opportunities and even labor shortages in some skilled positions.<sup>16</sup>

The ability of organized labor to spread unions in the core mass-production industries depended in part upon the response of American workers in those industries. Employee characteristics varied widely along lines of skill, gender, race, ethnicity, and occupation. Most of them supported FDR but remained largely isolationist. In 1941 twenty million Americans worked in industry and related occupations. Males predominated, making up three-quarters of this population group. Many in the East were first- or second-generation immigrants, with the second generation being much more integrated socially and politically into the American mainstream and more accepting of unions. Hispanics, both native born and immigrant, made up an increasing part of the labor force, mostly in the Southwest. African Americans had become an increasingly important segment of the industrial workforce, making up 7 percent of the workforce in

1941, and many blacks continued the great migration out of the South into large metropolitan areas of the North and West. Women workers tended to be concentrated in low-wage and insecure industries and service trades. Unemployment began to decrease significantly after the defense buildup, but many workers still lived below, at, or near the poverty level.<sup>17</sup>

Generalizations about the attitudes of the American working class are difficult to make, given its diversity and the lack of empirical data. In public opinion polls workers and lower income people showed an awareness of exploitation and injustice yet no general sense of outrage at the American system. They often perceived differences in wealth and income but still persisted in being included in the “middle class.” On political matters, such as labor law or medical care policy, working people had more of a liberal or left-wing perspective than upper-income groups.<sup>18</sup>

Workers looked skeptically upon unions and their leaders as having too much power, yet polls consistently showed that two-thirds or better supported unions. Many also expressed a belief that their own wages and hours were basically fair. The polls never asked questions, however, about the conditions of their work or what they thought of its value and how it did or did not contribute to their quality of life. Although some employers had tried to make the workplace more rational and fair with forms of welfare capitalism, management still held and exercised much arbitrary power. Furthermore, as

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<sup>16</sup> Nelson, *Shifting Fortunes*, 127; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 171-72.

<sup>17</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 11-15.



the war continued and American involvement in it escalated, wages and hours became more prominent concerns. Whether frustration over such conditions would translate into support for a union depended on the degree of problems and the makeup of the workforce in a particular business. Most union activists and organizers tried to build support on the basis of “industrial democracy,” which to them meant “creating fair and orderly procedures to govern the daily lives of workers in such matters as wage determination, access to training and promotion, layoffs, job assignments, and discipline.” Few unionists tried to promote the idea of worker control of the production process.<sup>19</sup>

Labor organizers directed their efforts toward industries without unions and toward places with a union presence that needed strengthening and stabilization. Defense orders definitely helped, as the government made some attempt to contract with employers who had stable work forces, and as businesses did not want disruptions that decreased production, and thus profits. Throughout 1940 and 1941, unions made advances across the industrial spectrum. CIO drives at Ford and the Little Steel companies finally succeeded for the UAW and SWOC after years of being pushed back. Other previous holdouts also fell, such as Westinghouse to the United Electrical Workers (UE), International Harvester to the UAW, and Goodyear to the URW. The CIO also made important gains in shipyards, aircraft factories, and southern textile mills. Most of these were the culmination of long and bitter struggles that had lasted since the 1930s,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 115-16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 116-22 (quotation p. 120).

where unions fought on the shop floor, in the streets, in the courts, and in the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).<sup>20</sup>

The NLRB was especially helpful in some cases. In 1935, due to the pressure from organized labor, increased militancy among workers, and liberals' search for a way to boost purchasing power while stabilizing industry in the midst of the Great Depression, Congress had passed the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), also known as the Wagner Act. This law embodied the new federal collective bargaining policy that came out of the New Deal. The act established the NLRB as an independent, quasi-judicial agency in the executive branch outside the Department of Labor. The Board made decisions that set federal labor policy pertaining to company unions, elections of employee representatives, designating appropriate units of representation, bargaining obligations and procedures, the closed and union shop, unfair employer practices, and other areas. The NLRB could use the courts to enforce its orders. Many of the NLRB-supervised elections during the war years were overwhelming victories where the union received 70-80 percent of the vote. AFL unions also made gains, especially with skilled workers in defense industries. Some AFL unions, such as the International Association of Machinists (IAM), also made large gains in the mass-production industries. There they had more or less copied the strategy of CIO unions since the late 1930s and created industrial unions. An even more favorable condition for the AFL was that some

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 121-26; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 44-47.

employers accepted AFL unions to stop or thwart the CIO unions, which they believed would be worse.<sup>21</sup>

The years 1940-41 saw many workplace disruptions as workers went on strike more times than any comparable period in the 1930s. These disputes had numerous causes. In addition to fighting for union recognition, unionists called strikes—and CIO unions were involved in 70 percent of the disputes—because of low wages, poor working conditions, refusal of employers to bargain in good faith, arbitrary or unfair actions of supervisors, and failure by employers to remedy grievances quickly and fairly. In the new economic environment workers began to see the benefits unions could bring, and with unions achieving more stable dues-paying memberships, they then concentrated more on collective bargaining and less on mere survival.<sup>22</sup>

Numerous employers continued to resist union actions. Employers generally believed that the presence of unions demanding higher wages or other improvements would hurt their long-term position after the war ended and government involvement relaxed. Throughout the war businessmen feared labor's growing strength would reduce profits, weaken their firm's position in the economy, and lessen managerial control over the workforce. The business community was also very concerned about the effects of labor's influence in the economy and the overall way of thinking about the American

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<sup>21</sup> Irving Bernstein, *The New Deal Collective Bargaining Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 84-87; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 172-73; Mark Perlman, *The Machinists: A New Study in American Trade Unionism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 105-11.

<sup>22</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 41, 46-50.

economy and society. These practical and ideological considerations had been met with great urgency by businessmen since the 1930s, and this continued into the war and after as they saw the continuation of the “free-enterprise system,” and their position in it, hanging in the balance. Many unions and management teams were inexperienced in settling disputes within the new labor relations framework. Also, distrust remained strong on both sides in some areas with a history of bitter disputes. Another contribution to these disruptions was the rivalry between CIO and AFL groups over jurisdiction and coverage.<sup>23</sup>

The strikes during these years had a minimal effect on defense production—only one-fourth of 1 percent of man days were lost, less than in previous strike-torn years—but concern remained that production could be critically affected during disputes at crucial points in the production or distribution lines, even in non-defense industries. The strikes often made newspaper headlines, and the anti-union press and politicians attacked labor and called for outlawing strikes in defense industries. In hopes of staving off anti-labor measures, top officials in both the AFL and CIO made voluntary and informal no-strike pledges in late 1940, but as strikes increased in 1941, unionists faulted businesses for failing to recognize unions or bargain in good faith, while many corporate leaders and Congressional conservatives blamed labor and wanted the government to intervene to halt labor actions and disruptions. Also, public opinion polls showed that most people blamed unruly workers for the lagging defense effort. Yet FDR and his supporters tried to rely on

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<sup>23</sup> Harris, *The Right to Manage*, 58-74, 91-104; Zieger, *The CIO*, 121-22.

the NLRB, the Labor Department, and the Office of Production Management (OPM)—created by FDR in January 1941 to replace the NDAC, with Hillman as co-chairman and at the head of the labor committees—to use government exhortation and negotiation instead of force.<sup>24</sup>

To deal with mounting labor troubles and criticisms of the conflicts, FDR created the National Defense Mediation Board (NDMB) by executive order in March 1941 to aid in settling labor disputes in defense industries. The AFL initially favored the board. Phillip Murray, who had been voted in as president of the CIO in late 1940 after Lewis agreed to step down if FDR was reelected, and others in the CIO predicted it would be too anti-union to support fully. The tripartite board consisted of four employer, four union, and three public representatives, and at the request of the Labor secretary it had the power to “hold hearings, make findings of fact, recommend terms of settlement, or provide arbitrators with the parties consent” if the Labor Department’s Conciliation Service could not resolve the dispute. The presence of the NDMB eased pressure in Congress to enact anti-strike legislation, and it made the public less uneasy about labor trouble. The Board was fairly successful in getting the two sides to put more effort into bargaining or in getting them to agree voluntarily to arbitration.<sup>25</sup>

Wage disputes and union security measures constituted the bulk of items considered by the NDMB. Most businesses began to accept slow but steady raises in

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<sup>24</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 46; Zieger, *The CIO*, 125-26; Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 47-48.

wages, which kept many AFL and CIO unions satisfied. Union security measures were more difficult to solve. In this area it was often a matter of principle as well as the long-term advantage that made the matter so contentious. Unions wanted assurances that they would not be weakened or destroyed by the changes occurring, so they demanded some form of the union shop. Without the ability to strike, as the unions had pledged not to do during the crisis, labor leaders feared they would not be able to show the employees that unions were worth keeping to protect their interests. Employers on the other hand hoped that the bulk of new hires would not be attracted to the union and that this would weaken its power over the workforce. They did not want to help the union by forcing their employees to be union members. The NDMB created a compromise policy that served as the basis for the later War Labor Board's union security measure. This policy, called maintenance of membership, allowed new employees to opt out of the union membership within a certain time period, but afterward they would be forced to remain members. This procedure allowed unions to avoid having to spend enormous amounts of time recruiting new employees.<sup>26</sup>

With these gains also came some real and potential problems for unionists. The main factors for success were continued rank-and-file militancy and acceptance of unions, the improved economic conditions, and, importantly, government involvement. Without favorable government actions the unions and workers would probably have been too

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<sup>25</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 42-45 (quotation p. 45), 55-57; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 50-53.

<sup>26</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 58-63.

weak against the powerful corporations to spread their coverage as much as they did.

Still, government influence had its drawbacks. Where employers or unions did not accept the NDMB ruling, the government threatened to take over the plant to enforce the decision, and it did this on a number of occasions.<sup>27</sup>

When the federal government intervened in such a manner, the reaction of unionists displayed their ambivalent attitudes toward the role of the state. One example is the Communist-led UAW strike at the North American Aviation Company in Inglewood, California in June 1941. The issues involved union recognition against an AFL rival—the International Association of Machinists—and pay raises. FDR threatened to use force after the UAW local refused to accept the NDMB recommendation on wages, which was well below what it demanded. When the union stayed out the troops were brought in, and a settlement was reached giving the UAW jurisdiction but also with many of the strike leaders fired. The top officials of the CIO accepted this partial defeat for several reasons. First, they did not mind Communists being removed and replaced with more obedient leaders. Problems with Communists abated, though, after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in late June. Communist leaders did an abrupt about face and became, perhaps, the most vocal proponents of continued production and the no-strike pledge. But more importantly, CIO leaders believed their success depended upon appearing to act in a responsible and patriotic manner. Although they did not want the government to impede their organizing goals, they also believed that the result of continuing to disobey the

government would be the adoption of restrictive labor legislation in Congress. Top CIO officials like Murray denounced the use of the military and forced arbitration. Yet they refused to openly defy government orders. Such a climate dampened dissent within the labor movement and delegitimized the use of the strike weapon. It also pushed the top CIO union leaders to centralize their controls over the locals. The AFL on the other hand also became increasingly critical of government involvement for its seeming partiality to CIO unions.<sup>28</sup>

The functioning of the NDMB began to break down by the fall of 1941. When John L. Lewis's United Mine Workers struck in September and October, they threatened to stop all steel production. Lewis refused to settle on the NDMB's decision not to allow the union shop for steel companies in the so-called captive mines with UMW presence. The CIO members on the Board also refused to accept the decision. This time the CIO believed its case was strong enough to resist. The UMW had registered 95 percent of employees in the disputed areas. They left the board in November, seeing this decision as a calculated attack against union security provisions. Although an arbitrator finally agreed to give the UMW the union shop, this affair showed that any group not satisfied with the work of the Board could refuse to cooperate.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 180-81; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 126-33; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 53-66.

<sup>29</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 64-67; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 181; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 69-70.



This resistance took on a directly political cast as Congress put forward a number of bills to deal with labor problems. Some were specific to a particular dispute occurring at the time. Others would have changed the national labor laws and left labor's rights weakened. At first, much of the hostility was directed at the National Labor Relations Board. Having failed to amend the Wagner Act, congressional conservatives moved their focus to attacking defense strikes and the closed or union shop. They argued that radical unions would destroy American productive capacity and the country's ability to defend itself.<sup>30</sup>

The most severe critics were Southern Democrats, and their most pressing demand was to outlaw strikes in defense industries. They wanted subversives removed from the labor camp and creation of a "right-to-work" environment, that is, no union security measures in defense industries. Several states did pass laws restricting the actions of labor unions and limiting strike actions. For example, Texas passed an anti-picketing law in 1941. Public opinion polls showed that most people were against the defense strikes. In December, Congress debated various anti-labor bills proposing to outlaw defense strikes and the closed or union shop. Utah senator Elbert Thomas, Democratic chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, buried these proposals, as he had for years in the Senate. How long this tactic could have worked was uncertain. Partly in response to the miners' strikes in the fall of 1941, the House passed an extremely anti-

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<sup>30</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 67-73.

union bill on December 3, but the Pearl Harbor attack caused the bill to be shelved, and political leaders took on a more cooperative approach toward labor as the war started.<sup>31</sup>

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor for the most part brought Americans together to fight the war against Japan, Germany, and Italy. Many labor leaders adamantly opposed fascism because of the persecution of unionists and others under these regimes. Leaders in both the AFL and the CIO, as well as a majority of workers, voiced support for the American government's war efforts. Opportunities for growth seemed good because military production would increase the size of the workforce, especially in industry, while FDR and other government officials were friendly toward labor. Also, the war against fascism had the aura of a people's war. Labor organizations hoped to project themselves as an organized and unified voice for ordinary Americans.<sup>32</sup>

But the war also brought potential dangers. There was a growing contingency of government officials and congressmen who were antiunion and reactionary. The war placed military production, not labor demands, as the government's top priority. At the same time many workers still remained aloof or suspicious of union leaders. Such conditions also put added stress on internal union affairs, for union leaders found it more and more difficult to address the numerous, and at times conflicting, wishes of the rank and file.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 173-75.

<sup>32</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 77-80.

<sup>33</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 142-43.

In January 1942, FDR called a management-labor conference to help develop wartime federal labor relations policies. The union and management conferees agreed to settle their disputes without recourse to either strikes or lockouts. They decided the main government action would be the creation of a labor disputes board. On January 12 President Roosevelt created the National War Labor Board (NWLB) by executive order to settle labor disputes that interrupted work that contributed to effective prosecution of the war. Since the NWLB was created under the president's broad war powers, it had respect and authority. Like the NDMB, the War Labor Board had a tripartite structure with four members each from labor, business, and the public, and it was intended to be used only after the normal bargaining structure and the Conciliation Service failed to forge an agreement. The public members held the balance of power in most decisions, so who filled these positions was crucial to labor. Most of the national public board members supported the New Deal, and they believed that industrial democracy, that is, collective bargaining by unions, made "capitalism more equitable and democracy more meaningful," as well as spread income out enough to avert an economic collapse and depression. They also believed that union security measures would ensure a cooperative union leadership and foster higher productivity. With the creation of the NWLB, the locus of government power for regulating labor relations and for setting policy moved from the NLRB to the NWLB and the White House.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 81-84; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 182-84 (quotation p. 183).

The NWLB was only one salient manifestation of the changing circumstances brought by the war for labor and business. The nature of competition among businesses changed as more and more industries were assured a market and a profit by government contracts. High profits were also not as important as they might otherwise be since the government instituted high tax rates and excess profit taxes. Economic activity steadily increased during the war, and unemployment shrunk. As certain materials became scarce, civilian production was curtailed, and the government tried to retain greater control or regulation of production, prices, and wages. Under his newly acquired war powers, FDR created numerous agencies, in addition to the OPM and the NWLB, to deal with regulating and controlling the economy. These bodies directed the conversion of plants to war production, the expansion of existing plants, and the building of new ones. They regulated the procurement, use, and distribution of raw materials and other goods; and they tried to influence the distribution of manpower and the conditions of employment.<sup>35</sup>

Some unionists feared the wartime controls would render their functions useless. Union security became a paramount concern under these circumstances when strikes could neither be used effectively to influence the outcome of a dispute nor used to exert their power to improve their members wages, hours, and working conditions. The no-strike pledge seemed to force unions to rely on the government as their only recourse in forcing management to accept their demands. Union leaders argued that in order to be

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<sup>35</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 89; Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-45* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), 1-14.

responsible unionists, that is, to settle grievances quickly, to keep production going, and to keep workers satisfied, the unions needed a growing membership base and full treasuries. Unionists claimed that they needed to reduce their efforts at recruiting new members and holding on to old ones so that they could spend more time improving production.<sup>36</sup>

Labor leaders knew that the changing circumstances of war might mean less rank-and-file enthusiasm for unions. Many of the newer workers had come from low-wage jobs with no union traditions. Often they were satisfied to get steady work with higher wages. Also, workers continued to use a traditional strategy of improving their working conditions—moving to a different job. Thus, job turnover, ignorance, apathy, and outright hostility to unions all gave union officials cause to demand government-guaranteed security measures. In response to management critiques that union shops restricted a worker's freedoms, unionists argued that joining a union was only another, and from their point of view beneficial, condition of employment a worker accepted when he took a job. It was also seen as fair and democratic since a decision by the majority held for all, and there would be no "free riders." Management then could not play members against non-members, although employers still retained the basic power to hire and fire. Finally, unionists believed these types of arrangements would benefit them in their long-term position after the war.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 89-94.

<sup>37</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 72-76; Zieger, *The CIO*, 145.

Management did not agree and objected to the union shop on principle since it restricted a worker's choice to join or not join a union, and it restricted employers' rights on hiring and firing. Management also did not want to be held responsible for helping to enforce membership rules and for collecting dues, which was the responsibility of the unions, they thought. They also feared that unions might use security clause provisions to force someone out of the union over internal differences or other potential abuses. Finally, employers feared the real strength that unions could acquire and the effect this could have after the war. Most corporate leaders expected the status quo to be continued, so where unions existed they would be left alone, with or without the open shop or other contract clauses. But they also expected that the government would not force unions on them. Businessmen expected the government to enforce the no-strike pledge and other measures to ensure peaceful conditions and continued production.<sup>38</sup>

The Labor Board eventually reached a compromise in which the public members more or less agreed with labor's arguments. Unions thought it was the best deal they could get in wartime, and business found it the least objectionable given the pressures on them to accept unions. In several cases in the first half of 1942, the Board worked out the details of this compromise. By June it had settled on a fifteen-day period when a new employee could withdraw from the union, but after which the worker had to remain in good standing for the life of the contract. This maintenance-of-membership clause became the standard union security measure in NLRB cases where a stronger security

clause did not exist. Many of the unions that benefited from this clause were the newer CIO unions that were still trying to organize in some areas and were negotiating their first contracts. In some cases where unions had not acted in a responsible manner, such as breaking the no-strike pledge, the Board either would not grant the security measure or revoked it if it already existed. Although collection of dues was difficult at times, most employees did not leave the union. Maintenance of membership factored importantly in the dramatic growth in union membership throughout the war. CIO membership expanded from 1.8 million in 1939 to 3.9 million in 1944. Overall union membership increased from 7 million in December 1941 to 13 million in August 1945.<sup>39</sup>

Determination of wages and connected issues took on great importance during the war, and the NWLB became the focus for wage policy early on. Government officials sought to keep inflation in check through sharp cuts in expendable income, which meant higher taxes, forced savings, and wage controls. The NWLB used various criteria to settle wage disputes: financial condition of the company, wages and living standards in the area, the effect on production and inflation, and the need to raise substandard wages. As with union security measures, laborites argued that the no-strike pledge curtailed their power to exact wage increases from employers through collective bargaining or other means. Labor leaders hoped inflation could be curbed by certain measures short of a wage freeze. The AFL proposed defense bond drives, increased Social Security taxes, increased

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<sup>38</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 92-93; Harris, *The Right to Manage*, 48-52; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 170-71.

income taxes on high incomes, increased corporate taxes, and rationing of scarce goods at certain price levels. Most of these policies would eventually be implemented, yet the NWLB and other agencies set out to enact a virtual wage freeze.<sup>40</sup>

In July 1942 the Board formulated the basic wage policy that guided it for the rest of the war. In what came to be known as the “Little Steel Formula,” named after the companies involved, wage increases were to be held at the rise in the standard of living since January 1941, which measured roughly at 15 percent. Since the base wages from which the raises would be based was also in January 1941 before the collective bargaining victories in the spring of 1941, however, wage increases in 1942 would be held to roughly 3.5 percent. This did not in itself implement a wage freeze, though. The formula applied only to disputed cases, which allowed unions to get higher wages from willing employers. Also, FDR announced Executive Order 9520 in October 1942, which gave the NWLB explicit authority to raise wages if income levels and standard of living were clearly substandard, or if it demonstrably aided the prosecution of the war. Many workers and labor leaders still remained dissatisfied with their incomes and continued to fight the government’s wage policies. As the war progressed these disputes became more heated and contentious.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 94-107; Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 79-81; Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s,” 1023.

<sup>40</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 70-71; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 109-13; Polenberg, *War and Society*, 22-25.

<sup>41</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 71-72; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 113-22; Polenberg, *War and Society*, 25-27.



Union leaders wanted to advance union, and indirectly working-class, interests not merely through organizational gains, but also by becoming more involved in government and business decision-making processes, notably through the government's war agencies. Those in CIO and some AFL unions hoped to "use the mobilization experience to shift the entire political economy in a broadly social-democratic direction." When their industrial council plans failed to gain attention from the government, they attempted to ally themselves with other disgruntled New Dealers or businessmen to change the pattern of economic planning and development. The war agencies were centers of continuing conflict among labor, corporate, military, agricultural, and small business interests, although a corporate industrial-military alliance came to dominate the political arena. The major economic decisions centered in the War Production Board, created in January 1942, and later in the Office of War Mobilization, created in May 1943. In addition FDR established a number of subordinate offices to handle more specific tasks. These bodies staffed "Dollar-a-year" businessmen, so-called because they retained their private sector positions, and like-minded military men in most positions. Labor leaders were largely disregarded, and their advice was ignored. For example, in the WPB labor advisory committees labor leaders sought to use them to implement some version of industrial councils. Labor representatives suggested ideas on production scheduling, care of tools and equipment, quality-improvement production methods, manpower, and other areas of concern. Yet it was made clear by the civilian leadership that these committees were solely for boosting morale and production, not for interfering with management's affairs.

State and local agencies had labor representatives in manpower commissions, price and rationing boards, and civilian defense committees, but they usually played a secondary role compared to business-management related people. Part of the problem for labor was that it had fewer qualified people, and of those who were qualified many were not willing to take time away from their union positions.<sup>42</sup>

While union influence seemed to hit an impasse, some top labor leaders, mostly in the CIO, continued to act in a defensive mode, hoping to influence FDR and his supporters to hold off right-wing attacks. But employees throughout the country showed signs of restlessness and discontent as strikes, slowdowns, and other disruptions spread in early 1943 and increased thereafter. Strikes reached a near-record level in the last years of the war, but they were usually very short, often only a shift long. Little production time was lost, and productivity levels remained very high. Everyday types of problems at the workplace produced most of these strikes. They included “disputes over production standards, treatment by foremen, wage classifications, job assignments, disciplinary actions, and standards of health, safety, and comfort.” Since unions had made their no-strike pledge, employers often ignored such problems, and they used bureaucratic mechanisms of dispute resolution to stall action. Management feared a continued erosion of its authority. As the war progressed management reasserted its power and undercut shop-floor grievance procedures and collective bargaining. The NWLB could not handle

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<sup>42</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 82-95 (quotation p. 83); Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 186-88; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 173-79.

all the disputes, so the Board established regional labor boards in early 1943. These bodies were of little help, however, since they usually sided with management. Also, with union security measures and mandatory dues check-off in place, and as unions became increasingly bureaucratic, union leaders started to drift away from the rank and file. Often workers saw quick strikes as the best means to influence the settling of their grievances.<sup>43</sup>

Longer strikes did occur, but in such instances workers had to confront a largely unsympathetic public and government reprisals. Although the NWLB had no enforcement powers, it could recommend that FDR authorize plant seizure to secure compliance. The NWLB could also compel obedience by threatening to take away, or by actually revoking, privileges such as maintenance-of-membership clauses.<sup>44</sup>

Concerns over wages and income caused much discontent among employees and numerous work disruptions. Although by 1942 real wages rose above depression year levels, and the official unemployment rate stood at 1.3 percent, several factors contributed to the rise being small for most workers. Prices and the cost of living rose. Higher tax deductions and the purchase of war bonds also reduced disposable income. Premium pay for weekends and holidays was gradually eliminated after FDR's Executive Order 9240 in September 1942 with the rationale that such pay schemes gave employers disincentives to all-out production. Another rollback justified by production needs was the widespread use of incentive wage plans. Also, wage differentials caused discontent. The NWLB was

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<sup>43</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 150-52 (quotation p.150); Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 117-21.

<sup>44</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 131-32.

unwilling to set national wage standards in industry, although it did have the authority to correct inequities. The Board helped correct some inequalities for blacks and women, and it lowered the North-South differentials in textiles and other low-wage industries. Still intraregional, and intraplant, differentials remained in numerous places. FDR's Executive Order 9328, the "hold-the-line" order, in April 1943, and the increased power of other agencies to restrict the authority of the NWLB, reduced the power of the Board to grant upward equalization orders. The hold-the-line order also restricted workers' ability to leave a job and find new work to increase their income. Labor leaders strongly criticized these developments, arguing that prices and profits did not have the same types of controls and that the government was catering to the war profiteers.<sup>45</sup>

The most politically and economically disruptive strikes during the war were the walkouts by the UMW from April to November 1943. Lewis led a half-million workers off work four times in a battle with mine owners, the White House, and the NWLB. The UMW split from the CIO in 1942, after continuing conflicts between Lewis and other CIO leaders, and remained independent until it rejoined the AFL in 1946. Many miners had the same restless spirit evident in the growing wildcat movement while the autocratic Lewis continued to receive die-hard allegiance from the rank and file. Lewis and the UMW protested their low wages, labor's small political influence in the war agencies, and FDR's and the NWLB's resistance to further improving labor standards. Lewis went so far as to call for the dissolution of the NWLB and to maintain that labor no longer was

bound to the no-strike pledge. Although labor leaders agreed with the UMW's wage demands, some CIO leaders feared that their government-cooperation strategy would be discredited if Lewis's direct action strategy produced a victory. Government officials also believed that if Lewis prevailed with wildcat strikes, the NWLB's and responsible union leaders' prestige and power would be diminished. After the government seized the mines, and workers continued to strike even without the prodding of Lewis, FDR ordered Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to negotiate a settlement with Lewis. In early November the NWLB reluctantly approved the agreement which gave an increase in income of about 25 percent to the miners. Instead of increasing wages, they added hours to the miner's workweek, mostly by adding time miners traveled from portal to portal to their working hours. The use of portal-to-portal pay kept the Little Steel formula intact, and no other union won such a conspicuous increase in income. The NWLB also continued to function and retained basic authority in labor relations for the rest of the war. Still the UMW strikes showed that, at least under certain conditions, unions could break out of government restrictions through direct action if they had the will to try. The UMW strikes influenced some labor leaders and workers to try to persuade their own unions to work outside the government-sanctioned labor relations machinery to achieve their goals,

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<sup>45</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 96-117; Zieger, *The CIO*, 163-69; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 120-27.

but the UMW strikes also set in motion an antilabor reaction in Congress, as numerous labor leaders had feared.<sup>46</sup>

In the midst of the UMW strikes, Congress passed the Smith-Connally War Labor Disputes Act in mid-June over a presidential veto. Some administration liberals and FDR wanted anti-strike legislation, but they were afraid it would only alienate their labor allies. FDR vetoed the legislation mostly because he believed it would foment strikes rather than quell them. Conservative Southern Democrats and Republicans had advocated this kind of antilabor move since the late 1930s, and they used the war crisis and public disfavor of wartime strikes finally to gain support for the law. The most damaging conditions for labor were the possibility of strike leaders to be fined or imprisoned and the prohibition of union contribution to federal political campaigns. The law also gave statutory authority to the NLRB and to the president's already existing power to seize any struck facility. The lawmakers mandated a thirty-day cooling-off period, after workers voted to approve a strike notification, on the mistaken premise that corrupt and unscrupulous union leaders led workers astray from their real wishes. Liberals thought that the cooling-off period would make it more difficult for national leaders to deal with disgruntled locals. AFL and CIO leaders soundly denounced the legislation, although ironically local unions used the cooling-off period to their advantage. Many times strikes were called to strengthen their bargaining position with employers and the Labor Boards. The vast majority of actual stoppages, though, occurred without the cooling-off period. Other bills restricting union

activities were put forward at the national and state levels, and a number of states in the South and West enacted antiunion measures. Conservatives forwarded this kind of legislation before, but they previously received much less support. The groundwork was being laid for the postwar antilabor reaction.<sup>47</sup>

The new legal restrictions did not seem to have a great effect on workplace stoppages, for strike levels remained high in 1944 and 1945. Only 5 percent of all strikes in 1945, moreover, followed a strike vote and cooling-off period. Strike numbers steadily increased from 2,968 in 1942, 3,752 in 1943, to 4,956 in 1944, and then dropped off due to a shorter period, to 2,971 in 1945. The number of workers involved also showed an upward trend, as did man-days idle, although the latter peaked in 1943 with the mine strikes. Although the percent of working time lost never reached above the very low figure of one-seventh of 1 percent in any one year, many of the strikes occurred in defense industries where they received a lot of attention from the press—a press heavily influenced by business attitudes. Numerous government and business leaders blamed labor strikes for delays in manufacturing and for having a general crippling effect on war production. Such claims were serious because they meant that workers received the blame for the lagging war effort, and opponents even leveled explicit charges of treason against strikers. Laborites responded that production delays had numerous causes. They

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<sup>46</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 157-61, 169-70; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 188-89.

<sup>47</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 165-68; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 140-42, 190-91; Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, 190-92.

forthrightly blamed management and government mistakes, incompetence, and unfairness. Unionists admitted that strikes caused some problems but that the reason for the strikes nearly always pointed to employer injustices.<sup>48</sup>

The increase in the diversity of people within industries and other workplaces also created tensions that at times erupted in strikes or other disturbances. One of the most significant effects of the economic changes during the war was the continuing integration of different groups into the mainstream of American economic and political life. The experiences of three important groups—blacks, Hispanics, and women—displayed some widening of opportunities by the war, but their experiences also disclosed the high level of continuing discrimination and injustice within American society.

African Americans made substantial gains in employment during the war. In manufacturing black employment rose 150 percent during the defense crisis, and in war related industries the percentage of black employment rose from 3 percent in 1942 to 9 percent in 1944. Most African Americans found employment primarily in agricultural work or unskilled and service jobs. Even with the requisite skills or experience, many blacks were denied work in defense industries. Numerous unions, mostly in the AFL, either barred blacks or required separate locals. Some white CIO unionists, like the Communists, sincerely believed in advancing African-American rights, while others saw their inclusion as critical to the success of their goals of creating workplace justice for all

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<sup>48</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 135-6, 190.



employees. African-American unionists often tied workplace activism with a broader movement for civil and political rights.<sup>49</sup>

The labor needs of the war mobilization, plus the fact that millions of men left their communities for military duty, opened up work opportunities for women, at least for the duration of the war. The number of women in the workforce increased from about 13 million in 1940 to about 19 million during the wartime peak in July 1944. The war allowed many women to move up in the workforce, from female dominated jobs in domestic and personal service to industrial and government jobs. To some extent, this helped undermine ideological assumptions about women's capabilities, or lack thereof, that greatly hindered their progress. Pay inequalities also began to erode. Women were able to command higher wages due to labor shortages and by moving into occupations previously considered men's work, especially in union shops. In 1942 the NWLB made some moves toward establishing that women receive equal pay for equal work, and women's income relative to that of men's did increase. Still many workplaces, some with union contracts, did not end wage differentials or other areas of discrimination against women. Women were also often the first to be laid off when cutbacks came. In addition to discrimination in finding or keeping a job, women faced the added burden of having the primary responsibility for taking care of their family and home. The degree of women's participation, influence, and leadership within the unions varied from place to place and "depended in part on the proportion of women in the wartime membership, the

ideological or political heritage of individual unions, and the personalities of key leaders.”<sup>50</sup>

The disruptions that occurred in the last years of the war showed the resistance of ordinary workers to the demands of business, government, and even their own unions in trying to force conditions the workers did not accept. Still, the strikes were often over simple grievances and frequently were connected to general support for unions, the no-strike pledge, and the war effort. The presence of new and inexperienced union workers did contribute to some of the disruptions—creating racial and sexual tensions, and diluting the unions influence. Workers often had a hard time adjusting to the social changes and disruptions during the war, and they frequently reacted with apathy, resignation, or hostility toward other people in the community, toward other workers, and toward government, business, and union authorities.<sup>51</sup>

The most important indicators of what workplaces went on strike, though, were industries where a great amount of workplace reorganizing occurred, where there existed an “oppositional infrastructure and a preexisting tradition of struggle into which these new recruits could be acculturated,” and where factional infighting was prevalent. For example, most of the strikes in the UAW, known for its militant factions, occurred in the old centers of UAW strength, i.e. the Detroit area, rather than factories located outside

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<sup>49</sup> Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 165-67; Zieger, *The CIO*, 152-54; Polenberg, *War and Society*, 99-102, 113-18.

<sup>50</sup> Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 23-24, 35-60 (quotation p. 57).

this region. In fact, wildcat strike activity during the war occurred disproportionately in the Detroit area, in Akron's rubber industry, and in the mines with a UMW presence. Although serious disruptions and challenges to union and government controls were not widespread, lesser forms of these phenomena did occur in many industries throughout the country. The same basic conditions and circumstances—ones that caused significant dissent—prevailed in American workplaces, but workers' responses differed. Still, there was a great amount of foreboding by unionists, businessmen, and government officials whether seemingly minor problems might erupt into damaging conflict.<sup>52</sup>

The secondary leadership of the unions—stewards, committeemen, local leaders—were put in a difficult situation during the war. The top officials tried to get them to quell the rank-and-file militancy and dissent. If they did, though, they risked losing their positions or the disintegration of the local. Many of these local unionists questioned the usefulness of unions when so many edicts restricted their behavior. The redress of grievances through government agencies was either time consuming or produced few results. They were accustomed to holding their power and allegiances by the type of day-to-day actions that were being circumscribed. Some of these local leaders tried to regain rank-and-file respect and their own powers by coordinating plant closures with picket lines, participatory employee meetings, and the formulation of a distinct set of demands upon the employer, the government, and the international union. Impressed by

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<sup>51</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 147-51.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 151-52; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 126-27 (quotation p. 126); Harris, *The Right to Manage*, 60-61.

the UMW's successful fight in 1943 many of these local leaders and their rank-and-file supporters led movements to support the wildcat strikes, to repeal the no-strike pledge, to support independent political action outside the two major parties, and generally to pressure the government to act more favorably toward labor. Pressure in the UAW and the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) was so great that the executive boards of the two unions passed resolutions calling for the end of the no-strike pledge and the dissolution of the NLRB. Still, most unions did not organize at this level of dissent.<sup>53</sup>

As many conflicts erupted during the war years, the top union leadership had to mediate between the needs of its rank and file and local leadership and its goals of responsible unionism in relation to the government. This was much more of a concern in the CIO than in the AFL for several reasons. AFL unions and leaders frequently did not have as militant a history of opposition to employers as the CIO unions had. AFL leaders were not viewed to be as great a threat to the economic and political power of business and commercial interests as the CIO, so when faced with an almost certain union presence at a workplace, employers often preferred AFL unions, at times colluding with them to get contracts before the CIO won representation rights. AFL unions also tended to be less democratic and more discriminatory in their actions. The top union leaders did not see militant actions as a threat to their leadership. They even promoted it at times when in competition with CIO unions. As the top CIO leadership tried to rein in the militancy of employees, some AFL unions made strong appeals for such things as higher

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<sup>53</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 127-35, 149-56; Zieger, *The CIO*, 170-74.

wages to appeal to workers. The AFLs greater unwillingness to sacrifice for the war was also part of a greater “business unionism” mentality in the older federation than in the newer, and more social democratic, CIO.<sup>54</sup>

During the last years of the war, the national CIO leadership—wanting to make labor look good to the public in an election year, to appear favorable to the administration, and fearing even more antilabor legislation out of Congress—tried to counter the rising militancy and conflict within the unions by upholding the no-strike pledge and the NWLB procedures and relying “upon increasingly bureaucratic and undemocratic methods of institutional control” to create order and stability in their ranks. The leadership also tried to hold back the adoption of national service legislation that would put severe restrictions on workers’ movement and ability to seek alternative employment. Politicians, including FDR, hoped the legislation would make manpower use more efficient and help deter strikes or other problems. Union officials, in addition to thinking national service generally unjust to workers’ rights, believed such measures would weaken the appeal and influence of unions.<sup>55</sup>

Numerous top union leaders and government officials, notably those on the NWLB, reasoned that a form of industrial jurisprudence—the settling of grievances or other issues within bureaucratic procedures and off the shop floor—would harmonize relations between management and labor. This process was adopted so readily that it

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<sup>54</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 161; Zieger, *The CIO*, 171,173.

<sup>55</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 178 (quotation), 182-85; Polenberg, *War and Society*,175-83.

seemed part of a natural process of industrial relations. Indeed, unionists did see the benefits. The process imparted a union consciousness to the workers. It seemed better than constant confrontations with management on the shop floor. Industrial jurisprudence also was a model for democracy in the workplace and an institutional restraint on management's power. But this process also weakened union power by taking it away from the shop floor, where stewards and workers had the most leverage, to bureaucratic procedures, where the values of management authority and orderly production would be more important. The involvement of the NWLB, NLRB, and other government agencies during the war in labor relations strongly reinforced this trend. For example, the NWLB usually did not take the case of a union on strike, it expected union leaders to discipline their workers, and it threatened to remove maintenance of membership and dues check-off if unionists refused to be "responsible." The NWLB judged a union's worth not on the basis of internal structures, and how democratic they were, but simply whether they cooperated with the government. If the local leadership had tried to prevent a wildcat strike, and they showed their loyalty and responsibility, then the NWLB often did not discipline them. Many leaders continued to support responsible unionism fearing a repressive backlash if rank-and-file militancy was unleashed—a rank and file who themselves continued to favor anti-strike legislation by margins of 2 to 1 in opinion polls. They also believed the gains they had made during the war years were satisfactory and

that this would lay the basis for postwar gains in areas they had yet to produce a significant presence.<sup>56</sup>

Turning away from traditional activism as the main source of union power, and believing that their institutional basis had largely been laid with their position in the mass-production industries, union leaders took on other forms of political action. One such effort was the activity of the CIO-Political Action Committee (PAC). The CIO created its PAC in 1943 to assure FDR's reelection, to campaign for labor friendly candidates, to promote a progressive agenda, and to co-opt the rising movement for independent political action and transform it into Democratic party channels. CIO leaders hoped this would be the best way to mobilize the rank and file instead of at the shop floor level, and they made efforts to create local committees. They also believed that maintaining their ties to the Democratic party remained the best and most practical means of influencing government policy. Evidence of CIO-PAC's influence on the elections were mixed. To most union observers the results proved unsatisfactory, and the presence of a PAC seemed to make little difference at the polls. The political drive certainly failed to bring the mass of working-class voters to support a broad progressive agenda. Nor did it reconnect the rank and file to the national leadership. A minority of unionists advocated independent politics through a party that was unconnected to the Democrats. Although in the long run, as one historian has remarked, "it would seem that social democracy

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<sup>56</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 179-82; Zieger, *The CIO*, 152, 174-77.

requires a social democratic party,” support for independent, working-class politics was thin among union leaders, the rank and file, and the working class generally.<sup>57</sup>

WWII thus had a profound effect on the American working class. It brought better pay and near full employment. Ethnic identities began to unravel, and a greater degree of racial and religious toleration spread. More people became involved in the consumer culture, and the national government made its presence felt in communities more than ever. The American working class was “less provincial, more tolerant, and more expectant of material gain than it had been in 1940. It was at once more regimented, better organized, and less willing to put up with scarcity, unemployment, and hard times.” The war stabilized union membership and finances, and the unions spread throughout the mass-production and related industries. This put organized labor on a solid footing as a real force in the economy. With CIO-PAC and other efforts, unions became more involved in the Democratic party and the political arena generally. Still, the war brought many new workers into the work force and into unions who had little interest in labor organizations. Union leaders became further separated from the rank and file, and many unions were less democratic. Although elections and hearings were important, shop floor activity was largely delegitimized. Also, many African Americans, other minorities, and

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<sup>57</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 177-88; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 171-77; Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion*, 200-04; Moody, *An Injury to All*, 35-39 (quotation p. 39).



women came into the workforce causing serious racial and sexual tension in some areas.

Both opportunities and obstacles loomed large by the end of the war.<sup>58</sup>

As has been demonstrated, the growth of unions during the war occurred due to war-induced economic changes, lessened employer resistance to unions, government protection of union activities, and the efforts of unionists across the country to strengthen organized labor. The vast majority of leaders in the labor movement were pressured by employer obstruction of growing union power and by rank-and-file discontent over inadequacies in wages and working conditions to steer an unsteady course between subservience to the federal government and outright dissent against it. They remained committed to the overall American war effort and the government's policies, and they used economic and political pressure to obtain the best results that they thought were feasible.

This discussion and analysis of the national labor movement during the war years provides a basis for understanding unions at a local level, unions such as the International Association of Machinists District Lodge 776 of Fort Worth. With a concentration on the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of Fort Worth union officials within the context of the national labor movement, the following chapters discuss the interaction of local union leaders with the rank and file and other employees, national and local Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation (CVAC) management—the company whose employees District Lodge 776 represented—and government officials. As stated in the introduction,

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<sup>58</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 141-42.

the remaining chapters will argue three main points concerning IAM District Lodge 776.

First, the experiences of the Fort Worth Machinists demonstrate on a local level the basic themes of American labor history during the war. Second, national, or outside, forces

decisively created the conditions for the emergence and continuance of the local union.

And third, even with these larger forces having a determinant impact on the union, the basis of strength and action for the local union still resided in the local union officials and the active rank-and-file members.

## CHAPTER 3

### DISTRICT LODGE BEGINNINGS: 1942 TO 1943

Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation employees created International Association of Machinists Lodge 776 at the company's recently built plant in Fort Worth, Texas in 1942. From its inception, District Lodge 776 faced resistance from CVAC. In order to build an effective labor organization that could withstand the company's opposition, union officials and rank-and-file members established an internal union structure, reached out to employees for membership and participation in union affairs, and looked to the national IAM and government agencies for aid, especially in obtaining a satisfactory contract and settling grievances. Although District Lodge 776 fared relatively well at first, CVAC hostility threatened to have a disintegrative effect on the union by the end of 1943.

An important part of America's "Arsenal of Democracy" was the aircraft industry and its production of bombers and other planes for the military. Aware of the potential economic benefits that government spending could bring to the area, Fort Worth city leaders solicited and succeeded in being awarded one of the Army's bomber assembly plants. Important considerations in deciding the location of airplane facilities were good testing and flying conditions, a decentralized location for defense reasons, and an adequate labor supply, all of which Fort Worth offered. The city government bought the

land for the plant and an adjacent airfield. The War Department constructed the plant, and the city and local companies worked to provide essential services to the site, such as transportation, electricity, and sanitation. The government granted Consolidated Aircraft Corporation the authorization to operate the facility. Consolidated only assembled the planes, while the auto and other industries supplied the parts. City officials anticipated the benefits to include the \$500,000 weekly payroll from the plant and the addition or expansion of local supplier parts plants and allied industries, although many of the parts eventually came from Ford operations in Michigan. By the time the plant went into operation in February 1942, Consolidated had merged with Vultee Aircraft, Inc., to become Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation (CVAC), and the new company ran the plant for the duration of the war. CVAC was one of the largest aircraft companies in the world at the time with other plants in San Diego, New Orleans, Tucson, Elizabeth City, NJ, Nashville, Allentown, PA, Louisville, and Miami. San Diego housed the main operations of the corporation, and the plant there served as a training ground for some of the Fort Worth workers.<sup>59</sup>

CVAC began hiring employees for its Fort Worth plant in November 1941 and sent roughly 400-500 of them to California for training. These workers returned to Fort Worth along with about 1,000 CVAC employees from San Diego. The plant began operations in February 1942, and these men formed the core workforce from which

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<sup>59</sup> *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 6 January 1941, 9 March 1941, 19 April 1941, and 18 March 1942; E. C. Barksdale, *The Genesis of The Aviation Industry In North Texas*

important skills for aircraft production were learned and then transferred to new workers. The San Diego CVAC had a collective bargaining agreement with the International Association of Machinists (IAM). The transferred workers who were members of the IAM wanted the same arrangement to exist in their new Fort Worth location. They formed IAM District Lodge 776 and created local 776-A in April for the first shift and local 776-B in May for second shift workers. The District Lodge also later incorporated a separate African-American local in April 1943. The Glover Colored Aircraft Workers Federal Labor Union No. 23394 covered all the black employees at CVAC. This was standard policy in the IAM at the time. African-American IAM members held their own meetings and elected their own officers, as did locals 776-A and 776-B.<sup>60</sup>

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(Austin: University of Texas, 1958), 8-10; George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1967), 695-96.

<sup>60</sup> D. L. 776 case brief, Eighth Regional War Labor Board files, case 8-D-58, University of North Texas Archives; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 15 November 1941 and 7 January 1942; J. J. Blake to William Sodd, 2 March 1943, University of Texas-Arlington Special Collections, collection AR 48, box 2, folder 12; Glover Colored Aircraft Workers Lodge 23394 agreement, 21 April 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 6, folder 18; Mark Perlman, *Democracy in the International Association of Machinists* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962), 44-46; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 3 November 1944; F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 226-27. Although it can be assumed that African Americans' experiences in Fort Worth were more or less as described in chapter 1, due to the lack of union files on the African-American local at the University of Texas-Arlington Special Collections, this essay does not, regrettably, address in any significant way, nor reach any definite conclusions on, the experiences of black workers. The D. L. 776 files that have references to African Americans are mostly a few articles in the union paper *Plane Facts* that discuss some of the national efforts by blacks, unions, and the government to ban discrimination and integrate African Americans into unions on an equal basis. For example, see *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 20 October 1944, 3 November 1944, 10 November 1944, 5 January 1945, and 10 August 1945.

In April 1942 the District Lodge requested that CVAC Fort Worth Division recognize the union as the sole collective bargaining agent. At the same time it filed a petition with the NLRB to conduct a representation election, but the Board dismissed the petition at the time due to its general policy of postponing elections in rapidly expanding work units. The UAW also attempted an organizing drive in the plant during the first year of operation. This effort faltered due to the IAM's head start and its resistance to UAW supporters, as well as a generally unfavorable climate that many CIO unions faced in the South. The UAW lacked significant supporters and withdrew by the end of 1942 when the NLRB finally agreed to hold a hearing on the IAM's request.<sup>61</sup>

Evidence of IAM support was conclusive. A field examiner for the Board reported the union presented 5,030 application cards out of a workforce of approximately 10,000, and a random check indicated that at least 37 percent of these were on the payroll. The most contentious issues addressed during the hearing were who would be included in the appropriate bargaining unit and when to have the election. Both parties agreed that all hourly-paid production and maintenance employees should be included, but disputes arose over other employees not directly connected to production, such as timekeepers, inspectors, and tool designers. The Board more or less decided to include those employees who performed manual labor and to exclude those who engaged primarily in clerical or technical duties. This ruling did not end coverage disputes, and in the years to

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<sup>61</sup> National Labor Relations Board, *Decisions and Orders of the National Labor Relations Board* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 46:1120-127; NLRB, *Decisions and Orders*, 47: 30-31; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 27 April 1945.

come the union continued to take cases before the NLRB that would expand the bargaining unit. The company refused to recognize the union until it was certified by the Board, and it argued that the election should not be held until the full workforce was in place. CVAC anticipated employing at least 30,000 workers, and it expected to reach that number by December 1943. The Board ruled that roughly half of the workforce should be in place by March and that this number would be sufficient for an election. It argued that additional waiting would deprive the right of employees to representation, some of whom had been at CVAC for over a year.<sup>62</sup>

Even with the election order, local NLRB personnel from the regional office in Fort Worth encountered resistance from CVAC officials. Edwin Elliott, director of the Regional NLRB, tried to convince John M. (“Jim”) Hassler, CVAC Industrial Relations head in Fort Worth, to cooperate with the election. Hassler had previously been in Birmingham, Alabama, where he was successful in blocking organizing efforts of steelworkers. The choice of Hassler to head this department, which had the responsibility of dealing directly with union and workforce relations, indicated the overall attitude of CVAC management toward unions and foreshadowed trouble ahead. Elliott talked directly to Hassler, who insisted that the election would not be held within the plant. Given this stance, Elliott decided to hold the election in the Board’s offices in the Federal Court Building for a twenty-four-hour period to give a chance for all the shifts to vote. Hassler objected to this proposal because he feared that only IAM members would make

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<sup>62</sup> NLRB, *Decisions and Orders*, 47: 31-37.

the effort to vote, and Elliott understood that this could be a problem. Elliott continued to correspond with Hassler and after he allowed him to observe an election at another local aircraft company, Elliott finally convinced CVAC to allow booths to be set up in the plant. In late February the union won the election overwhelmingly with 92 percent of the vote, and the NLRB certified the results on March 10, 1943.<sup>63</sup>

The union's main objectives in the first year were to set up a functioning internal organization, to negotiate and settle a collective bargaining agreement with CVAC, to deal with shop floor conditions and grievances, and to spread information to members and nonmembers about the union's activities in hopes of gaining support and dues-paying memberships. Organizational work took off after the election had been won. Jessie D. Smith and William ("Bill") Sodd won elections in the spring to the two top positions in the union and remained there until the end of the war. Both men were from the local area and had worked in production at the plant for over a year. As president and business agent for the District Lodge, Smith oversaw the running of the union. He was also the main person who dealt with shop-floor conditions and relations with company officials. As Secretary-Treasurer, Sodd mostly handled the financial matters for the union and the membership status of CVAC employees.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Edwin A. Elliot interview, UTASC, collection OH 52, 48-53; D. L. 776 case brief, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 30 October 1949; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 27 April 1945.

<sup>64</sup> Lodge 776-B minutes, 1 November 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 5; Sodd to Hassler, 22 February 1943, UTASC, AR 48 box 2, folder 15; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 27 April 1945 and 17 March 1944; Smith correspondence, 5 May 1943, UTASC,



D. L. 776 met biweekly with delegates selected from locals 776-A and 776-B. The two locals did not have stable leadership like the District Lodge had. People in the top positions of both locals switched several times during the war. Many women joined the union, and although women did hold some union leadership or other positions, men mostly dominated the locals. The two locals also held regular meetings at which Smith reported around 15-20 percent of the members attending—which, though of questionable accuracy, would mean hundreds of people. The locals set up various committees to deal with attracting members and shop-floor conditions, in addition to providing members to help with the negotiations.<sup>65</sup>

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AR 48 box 2, folder 14; Perlman, *Democracy in the International Association of Machinists*, 88-89

<sup>65</sup> Lodge 776-B minutes, 6 December 1943, 13 September 1943, and 11 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 5; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 17 August 1945; Sodd correspondence, fall 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 15; *Aircraft Bulletin*, fall 1943 and 9 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Lodge 776-A minutes, 15 December 1943 and 18 July 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 21; Smith, business agent's weekly reports for 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13. Regarding women in the union, since oftentimes the union documents listed only the initials of a member or officer, it is impossible to say how many women actually served as officers or in other positions, although at times they did put "Miss" or "Sister" in front of women's names. Since so few explicit references to women exist in the documents, though, and since it was reported that men predominated in the lodge meetings, it can be fairly assumed that women obtained little influence within the union. As discussed in the first chapter, this was certainly characteristic of the times, but the fact that some women did participate showed D. L. 776 was also in line with other progressive unions in moving toward greater participation of women. Even today women still hold a disproportionately low number of union positions relative to their membership numbers. As with African-American workers, the lack of evidence precludes any definite conclusions on, or in-depth treatment of, women's experiences, although again it can be assumed that women's experiences were more or less typical.

An important bargaining chip the union wanted to hold in the negotiations was evidence of strong support among CVAC employees for the IAM and its work. A crucial aspect of attracting and holding members was the distribution of information about the union and other matters of interest on the local and national labor movement. The national IAM had established a publication called *Aircraft Bulletin* to aid local lodges in this effort and sent it to sites with organizing drives at aircraft companies. It requested that local lodges send it information to include in the publication, which Lodge 776 began to do by the summer of 1943. Sister Judy Dickerson was nominated as chief editor for the lodge in July, and all local news was to be sent to her. The company did not allow the union to distribute the publication on company property, though, insisting that it was an outside publication similar to any other business publication.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the company produced its own publication, *The Eagle*, for aircraft workers and distributed it at the plant gates to counteract the union propaganda. The District Lodge decided to contact the War Department for assistance in its efforts. Smith and Sodd had been in contact with Grand Lodge representatives about the matter, and they agreed this might help. While Hassler still resisted, the local and national union representatives contacted War and Labor Department officials, who gave conflicting messages on whether it was within the union's rights to hand out the *Bulletin*. He continued to press the Grand Lodge for assistance since the employees who had obtained

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<sup>66</sup> District Lodge 776 minutes, 18 July 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 21; Smith to IAM vice-president Eric Peterson, 4 May 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11.

copies reportedly had a positive response. Smith reasoned that the more employees who saw it, the greater support the union would gain, and the quicker they would obtain a good contract.<sup>67</sup>

Obtaining a decent contract was the foremost concern for union officials and the active rank-and-file members. Talks began between the company and the union shortly after the election. The union proposed that the company accept the San Diego IAM Lodge agreement for use in Fort Worth. Talks broke down after the two sides disagreed over a number of important issues—union security measure, joint wage review, wages, retroactive pay, and features of the grievance procedure. Discussions renewed on 12 April, and on 20 April two conciliators from the U. S. Conciliation Service participated in the conference. Yet both sides still disagreed on the disputed provisions. Although the company and the union continued to discuss these matters periodically, the union took its case to the Eighth Regional War Labor Board (RWLB), located in Dallas, to resolve the disputed issues. Starting 15 June, the Board held a week-long panel hearing into the matter with representatives from the company and the union arguing their case.<sup>68</sup>

On the issue of union security, the union wanted a union shop or the standard maintenance-of-membership clause. If it could not get this, the union requested, at the

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<sup>67</sup>D. L. correspondence regarding *Aircraft Bulletin*, August to November 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Lodge 776-B minutes, 25 October 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 5.

<sup>68</sup>*Aircraft Bulletin*, 11 August 1943 and 18 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Sodd to Fort Worth District Court, 9 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 15; Smith, business agent's weekly report, 17 April 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13; D. L. 776 case brief, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives.

very least, that the company provide all eligible employees upon hiring a copy of the contract and an application with a dues deduction order. The company would be obligated to recommend joining the union and signing the dues check-off. IAM representatives argued that they requested this to maintain their membership base because of the long delays in recognition and negotiations by the company and due to the antiunion practices of CVAC. The company retorted that the union was strong enough and in no need for any security measure, and it denied the accusation of union discrimination.<sup>69</sup>

Both sides disagreed just as strongly on the other issues. The union requested a joint wage review with union representatives having a voice in merit increases. This, it claimed, would ensure a fair system of granting raises and maintain employee morale, thus improving production. The company argued that it had sole rights over granting merit increases and that it acted in a fair manner. Furthermore, the company replied that any complaint could be taken through the regular grievance procedure. On wages, Lodge 776 called for CVAC to implement the job classifications and wages that corresponded to a government agency directive for West Coast aircraft plants—the Southern California Aircraft Industry (SCAI) plan. Pressure by unions in West Coast aircraft industries for better wages and clearer wage classifications against unyielding employers had forced the federal government to establish a special agency to deal with these problems. Local IAM officials believed that this agency's subsequent order was good enough to support. In

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<sup>69</sup> RWLB notes, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives; collective bargaining agreement copy, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives; D. L. 776 case brief, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives.

addition to raising slightly the wages of many workers, the union tried, as many industrial unions attempted to do throughout this period, to stabilize the wage rates and classifications throughout the aircraft industry, and in CVAC plants in particular. Due to what the union saw as unreasonable delays in recognition and negotiations, it demanded retroactive pay from 18 March when the contract talks initially broke down. Finally, the union asked for a grievance procedure that gave the members greater power to pursue their cases, thus better ensuring that workers would proceed with complaints. The company denied the need for reclassifying jobs and wages, rejected the appropriateness of back wages, and declared that the grievance procedure had worked satisfactorily as it was.<sup>70</sup>

Regional War Labor Boards across the country tended to order less favorable contracts to unions than the NWLB, and the 8<sup>th</sup> RWLB in Dallas fit this pattern. The panel basically rejected the union demands and recommended that the union accept the contract as it stood with a few minor changes. One change it recommended was that a purely voluntary dues check-off should be included. After a two-month delay, the RWLB ruled in favor of the panel's conclusions. The union took its case to the National Board where it hoped to get a reversal of the Regional Board's ruling. All the contested issues were important enough for the union to continue to fight for them. The prevalence of such measures in other union contracts around the country provided optimism about winning the union's case at the national level. Although the NWLB created the National Airframe

Panel (NAP) in August 1943 to expedite processing of the large number of aircraft industry cases before the Board, the Grand Lodge warned D. L. 776 officers that the case still might take a long time due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and red tape.<sup>71</sup>

The union used the delay to appeal to workers to join or remain in the union and to attack the company. In the *Aircraft Bulletin* the leadership pointed to the benefits that a contract would bring, including vacation time, back pay, and protection from unfair treatment by management. The paper complained that the company only gave empty promises or seductive offers to fool workers into believing that CVAC had the employees' best interests in mind. The Machinists responded that only unions could securely provide such things as living wages. The union appealed to traditional American values of family, patriotism, and democracy to convince workers to support it. IAM members also did not shy away from attacking nonmembers. They criticized them for riding on the backs of unions. They compared the morality of a person who took the benefits of unions, but who did not want to pay for it with dues and member participation, to that of a bloodsucker. The *Bulletin* attacked CVAC for rejecting the union's reasonable demands. Since cooperation would create satisfied workers who would in turn bring

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<sup>70</sup> Collective bargaining agreement copy, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives; D. L. 776 case brief, RWLB files, case 8-D-58, UNT Archives.

<sup>71</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 18 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Grand Lodge Representative H. A. Schrader to Smith, 27 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 9; IAM President Harvey Brown to Smith, 10 November 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 13; Smith to Hassler, 14 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 14.

about a better production record, Lodge 776 asked employees to consider whether the company was interested foremost in production or profit.<sup>72</sup>

One of the best ways the union could show the benefits of membership was through its work on grievances. After the election, a grievance procedure had been set through which union and company representatives met and tried to work out solutions to various cases. Some grievances taken up by union officers occurred over firing of employees for unsatisfactory work. These employees thought they had been unfairly treated either by being required to do too much work or by having done the required work yet still having been fired. The bulk of complaints, though, had to do with wages. Union members reported widespread dissatisfaction with a lack of raises or with receiving pay not commensurate with their experience. For example, worker R. Dillard complained that he performed leadman duties but did not receive leadman wages. He also stated the people in his crew made ninety-three cents per hour compared to a similar crew who made \$1.08 per hour. Another worker, Clayton Guest, reported that he had eight years experience with electrical work, yet his request to be placed in the electrical maintenance department went unheeded. He had been moved around to different jobs that did not require these skills and paid less. Guest stated that only after threatening to quit did he receive a small raise. Other workers were promised raises and never received them. Employee Frank Rossow complained that new hires received higher wages than people who had been at CVAC for some time. Rossow, though almost certainly exaggerating,

claimed that people were quitting the plant over these kinds of situations faster than the company could hire replacements. Due to government procedures for changing wages that were complicated, very time-consuming, and often ineffective, the union put its hope in rectifying these types of conditions with a contract that included improved wages, a joint wage review, and clearer language on job classifications.<sup>73</sup>

At times the union took cases to conciliators or the RWLB to solve differences that could not be settled. One disruption over unresolved grievances led the RWLB to order changes in the grievance process. A group of six employees in the tool room walked out on 7 July over the firing of an employee in their work area. After the company fired them, the union requested that the company reinstate the tool and die makers without changing their work situation or benefits. In return the union promised to eliminate all grievances connected to these employees and their actions. The union also resolved not to treat this as a precedent and that it would not approve similar action by employees in the future. Grand Lodge representative L. M. Fagan and CVAC vice president George Newman signed an agreement effecting this compromise in late July. The union viewed labor-management relations as quite strained up to this point and believed that worker morale was low because of it. It hoped that the compromise, along with the new

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<sup>72</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, December 1943, January 1944, and August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, business agent's weekly reports, April to June 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13; grievance cases, 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 25; CVAC Vice President Frank Lauderman to D. L. 776, 9 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 4.



grievance procedure ordered by the RWLB in response to this case, would allow for more cooperative relations and relieve some of the pressure mounting from the rank and file.<sup>74</sup>

Smith and Fagan met with company representatives and the RWLB in Dallas after the tool room incident to settle the matter and work on a new grievance process. The RWLB's directive set up fifteen zones within the plant for the handling of grievances. Within each zone several workers were appointed or elected as group, or shop, committeemen. These workers represented the union and handled the complainant's case. The rules required that a complaint first be taken to a group committeeman, who then had to take it to the department supervisor for adjustment. If they did not obtain satisfactory results, they could take the grievance to the Lodge Grievance Committee, which in turn could take it before the Union-Management Grievance Committee. If the union was still not satisfied, then it could take the case to the RWLB or an arbitrator. With these formal procedures in place, workers had a better chance of winning their cases.<sup>75</sup>

The union stressed how important a job the shop committeemen performed for the workers and for the union in demonstrating its power on the shop floor. It emphasized that the department where the grievance originated was the proper place to handle such problems. Yet, as many union officials around the country realized, the restrictive

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<sup>74</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 4 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Smith, business agent's weekly reports, May 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13; G. L. rep. L. M. Fagan to CVAC Division Manager G. J. Newman, 27 July 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 13.

government regulations and the emphasis placed by both management and workers on continued production provided unions with little leverage to support wildcat strikes or other deviations from routinized labor relations, so union officials also emphasized the importance of proper handling of complaints through the authorized rules. To do otherwise—to allow unauthorized actions or sloppy work—would jeopardize the support unions received from government agencies or the respect of the workers. Given such circumstances, the union saw the grievance procedure as the fairest, most beneficial, and most practical method of resolving disputes.<sup>76</sup>

Although they had some difficulties in getting members to take group committeemen positions, local lodges 776-A and 776-B established the required committees and hoped the new setting for handling grievances would make their jobs easier and bring greater fairness to the shop floor. One important matter that the district lodge wanted to settle was a still unresolved problem stemming from the tool room dispute. The union expected CVAC to pay six workers who left work to testify before the RWLB in July. At a Union-Management Grievance Committee meeting in early October, Smith, who as president and business agent remained a permanent fixture on the committee, presented their case to an RWLB arbiter. They did not want a precedent to be set where workers went before the Board and did not receive compensation for lost work

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<sup>75</sup> Smith, business agent's weekly report, July 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13; D. L. 776 minutes, 11 July 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 21.

<sup>76</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 4 August 1943 and fall 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Smith, business agent's weekly report, August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13.

time. This would certainly discourage many workers from pressing their complaints to this level, if at all, where some of the most important disputes would be decided.<sup>77</sup>

Continued employer resistance began to take its toll on the union by the fall of 1943. The grievance procedure addressed some problems arising on the shop floor, especially several of the clearer violations by supervisors or managers of labor relations protocol. Its effectiveness increased when such was the case, but also when backed up by a relatively sympathetic RWLB. Even though the company made some efforts to create decent working conditions and wages, it remained largely antagonistic toward the union and unsympathetic to worker frustrations generally.

As a result, many in the workforce began to lose interest in union membership, if not the union itself. Total membership in the IAM began low but grew rapidly once the certification election took place. By March 1943 the District Lodge received 3,000 membership applications, and by May applications totaled 5,000. In July, when the RWLB rejected the union demands, and implementation of the contract was indefinitely delayed, the numbers began to drop. Smith remained optimistic and continued to report to the Grand Lodge that prospects for organizing were good throughout all of 1943, but about 2,200 employees had stopped paying dues by August. Hundreds of workers

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<sup>77</sup> Lodge 776-B minutes, 18 August 1943, and 18 October 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 5; *Aircraft Bulletin*, fall 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; Smith to Hassler correspondence, October to December 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 14; D. L. 776 minutes, 15 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 21; Smith, business agent's weekly report, 9 October 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 13.

dropped out each month thereafter, leaving the union with between one and two thousand members.<sup>78</sup>

District Lodge 776 and its affiliated locals had established internal structures, recruited able leaders, and communicated to their members through the *Aircraft Bulletin*. But if the Machinists could not conclusively demonstrate the benefits of a union to CVAC employees, then it was heading toward failure. Without a contract that provided basic provisions for wage increases, rationalized work rules, and fairness on the shop floor, the union would never achieve even a minimally stable membership. The drop in dues-paying membership clearly indicated this dilemma. During the first two years of the union's existence, its officials, with the help of national IAM officers, had attempted to reach a satisfactory contract settlement through collective bargaining and appeals to the Regional War Labor Board, but they obtained few tangible results. Given this set of

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<sup>78</sup> Membership list in D. L. correspondence, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 20; Smith, business agent's weekly report, April to December 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 14; Sodd to Lodge 1125 Sec.-Treas. J. J. Blake, 21 March 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 12; Smith to Brown, 17 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 13; membership report, 31 December 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 20; Sodd to *Machinist's Monthly Journal* editor Fred Hewitt, 2 September 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 1; inquiry blanks from the G. L., 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 2.

conditions, the most practical solution to the union's problems was to seek remediation through the NWLB at the federal level.

## CHAPTER 4

### STRUGGLING TO SECURE THE UNION AND THE CONTRACT:

JANUARY 1944 TO SUMMER 1944

Ongoing problems with management and a declining membership base pushed the union to request greater government involvement. Management continued to obstruct union activities and create problems on the shop floor. Although labor-management relations were not overwhelmingly poor, discontent was widespread, and some foremen created outright hostility between them and CVAC employees. Union leaders continued to reach out to its members in meetings, by handling grievances, and through its newly created local newspaper. Still, they had little choice but to look to the NWLB to get the contract they hoped would solve some of their troubles. Even though the National Board tended to be more sympathetic to labor than the Regional Boards, local union officials realized that the Board was not likely to give the union the treatment it deserved. After a long delay and threatening to strike to force a Board decision, the appeal efforts of local and national IAM officials paid off. In August 1944, the NWLB ordered a relatively satisfactory contract. However, the ambivalent attitude union officials had toward government involvement, and the deficiencies in the contract, showed that state regulation brought bittersweet results.

The union still attempted to reach out to CVAC workers for their support, membership, and participation during the first half of 1944. One very significant effort concerned the creation in January 1944 of its own local union paper—*Cowtown Plane Facts*. The District Lodge intended to finance, edit, and publish the paper locally and distribute it to CVAC employees, and it prepared to print 5,000 copies, which was the number of employees listed in the union files. The union leaders were concerned about countering CVAC's antiunion influences, but also they tried to counter the antiunion propaganda of the corporate press. The first edition stated "we have as a prime purpose the dissemination of facts relating to [and for the improvement of] the economic, social, and political problems of wage earners, farmers, independent merchants and the average professional people." The union believed that by bringing information and truth to people, they would act to correct various wrongs in society, and they would work together to secure just rewards for their hard work. In this way common people could protect themselves from exploitation by the small group of industrialists and financiers who controlled the economy. Using examples from the Fort Worth area and across the country, the Machinists described "the union's many years of experience, its progressivism, its democratic policies, and its proven ability to get results for the workers in the shape of higher wages, better working conditions and job security."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Smith correspondence, 7 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 7; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 14 January 1944 (first quotation), 20 January 1944 (second quotation), and 26 May 1944.

The District Lodge organized the paper to best pursue these aims. It appointed Frank Gauthier, who for months had been the local editor of the *Aircraft Bulletin*, as the chief editor, and J. P. Marlin became the business manager. The secretary-treasurer and two delegates from each local made up the Newspaper Finance Committee to oversee, approve, and report on the paper's finances. To ensure that the paper stayed true to the union's goals and purposes, the District Lodge created a committee to meet with the newspaper staff to help determine newspaper policies and another committee made up of the two local presidents and the District Lodge president as an advisory editorial staff. The District Lodge covered all the paper's expenses and distributed it for free until May when they began to charge for subscriptions. Gauthier had continued to send articles to the Grand Lodge for the *Bulletin* until May, when it told the union it could no longer finance the printing of the *Bulletin* for the Fort Worth union, and that the District Lodge should rely on its own paper to reach members and other employees.<sup>80</sup>

Getting the IAM publications to the workers remained difficult in face of obstruction by the company. The union tried to reach an agreement with CVAC to distribute its literature to workers when they entered or left the plant gates. The company refused, saying that it had the right to regulate what was done on company property and that the union could hand out material off company property after workers had left the main gate. IAM officials thought this was impossible to do without disrupting traffic,

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<sup>80</sup> Smith correspondence, 7 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 7; D. L. 776 minutes, 23 January 1944, 2 April 1944, and 23 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 11; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 28 April 1944, 31 May 1944, and 30 March 1944.



since workers left the main gate in cars or buses, so the local lodges filed charges with the War Labor Board against CVAC for interfering with the union's organizing work by prohibiting distribution of union literature to employees. The union hoped it would receive a favorable hearing since the NLRB had made rulings stating that unions had a right to communicate to employees to safeguard their right to self-organization, and that literature was a form of communication. This issue eventually was included as part of the contract negotiations.<sup>81</sup>

Distributing literature was only one of numerous grievances against the company in the first half of 1944. In large corporations management aimed to get the most work out of its labor force for the least cost. Although the pressure to maximize profits had lessened with profit-guaranteed contracts, this attitude did not cease during the war years when those government contracts created an opportunity to bring in large profits. Some in the aircraft industry feared they might be taken over or overwhelmed by automobile or other corporations, which had much larger capital reserves and a sure niche in the postwar economy, so they wanted to use the war years to secure their position with the coming of peace. Also, the government put a lot of pressure on the companies to finish orders as soon as possible. Furthermore, due to the quickly expanded production of the war years,

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<sup>81</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 17 March 1944.

CVAC faced aggravated problems of huge increases in the number of employees, disorganized and inexperienced workers, and shortages of materials and parts.<sup>82</sup>

Foremen were in the front line of the company's efforts to discipline its workforce, and many union members had a difficult time interacting with them. According to the Machinists, foremen often acted in ways to intimidate and confuse union members and to make the complainant feel like a fool who was wasting the foreman's valuable time. The defining characteristic of labor-management relations at this level was hostility.<sup>83</sup>

The union's shop committee personnel and their representatives thus did not have an easy task in confronting management over complaints from the rank and file as the war years progressed. Compounding shop committee's problems was the fact that some workers did not understand the proper procedures for processing grievances. Union officials fought off suggestions that the union did not produce satisfactory results by pointing out this fact. One of the most difficult obstacles to overcome in the whole procedure was providing enough convincing evidence to persuade higher company officials or government regulators to take corrective measures.<sup>84</sup>

Still the union took on numerous grievances that dealt with mistreatment by foremen and wrongful firing, often when directed specifically at union members and shop

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<sup>82</sup> Harris, *The Right to Manage*, 91-104; copy of CVAC Chairman Tom Girdler's speech before the Foreman's Club, Fort Worth, Texas Division, October 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 24; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 15 September 1943.

<sup>83</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 5 May 1944.

committeemen. For example, group committeewoman Bonnie Saunders claimed that after she had reported to management that two foremen had broken the smoking rules, as Industrial Relations manager Jim Hassler had requested shop personnel to do, her superiors targeted her for harassment. Her foreman, Mel Abbott, and a leadman had threatened to fire her numerous times and conspired to frame her for theft. They failed, though, due to Saunders having witnesses that testified for her. In addition, her superiors watched over her work in a distracting and harassing manner. She reported that she had also seen her foreman harass other workers and shove them around. Finally, she claimed that Abbott had spread vicious rumors defaming her character. Saunders believed that she had been specifically targeted because she was a shop committeewoman. Sam Reames, another union member, made this same accusation against his superiors. He had heard from other foremen that the reason he had not been promoted was due to the fact that the higher ups did not like him, that he was a “white-button man,” that is, a group committeeman, and that he was perceived as too much of a troublemaker and an agitator. Reames stated that when he had tried to convince other workers to join the union, they replied that they did not want to be treated like him.<sup>85</sup>

Other complaints over wrongful firings show the amount of discipline some foremen tried to instill on their subordinates. Worker E. P. Leonard stated that he had been fired for insubordination due to what he believed was an accumulation of small

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<sup>84</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 11 January 1944 and 5 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

<sup>85</sup> Grievance cases, 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 15.

incidences that annoyed his foreman. Leonard allegedly did not take the war bond drives seriously, and he criticized his superiors for their casual treatment of his suggestions on production methods, among other things. A review of his record showed him to be a good worker, so he was reinstated. Others reported being fired after requesting transfers to another department, for refusing to accept a transfer, for substandard production, for refusing to work after the end of the scheduled work period, or for other forms of perceived insubordination. Most of the grievances that went to the Union-Management Committee, or that were taken to a government arbiter, were settled in favor of the union as in the Leonard case. In these cases the worker was reinstated and at times given back pay for work days lost.<sup>86</sup>

Workers also addressed concerns over wages, seniority, workplace safety, rules that caused inefficiency, and certain minor grievances during 1944. Employees continued to complain that they did not get promotions when promised or that they were not making any more than workers who had much less experience and time at the plant. If they confronted the foreman, they often received the run around, and at times this only made the situation worse, according to some. Union officials also reported that the company disregarded seniority in a significant number of layoffs. In one instance union member J. D. McNeely and some fellow workers complained that McNeely had been laid off purportedly due to lack of work but that his position had actually been taken over by a

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid.; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 7 April 1944 and 21 April 1944; D. L. minutes, 16 April 1944, and 5 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 11; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 1

black worker with less experience. When asked about this situation, CVAC management responded that it often did not take age or length of service into consideration when making layoffs.<sup>87</sup>

Plant employees claimed to have other grievances. Some also believed they did not receive a fair deal when they were trained for a certain type of job and then given a position that required fewer skills and had lower wages. In one case regarding this type of complaint, the RWLB granted a five-cent per hour increase to workers in one work section after the union filed a request for a ten-cent raise. Accidents, or their anticipation by workers, led them to press their foremen to create safer conditions. These were met, at times, with indifference or avoidance of the concerns, but also other times with CVAC correcting the problems. Some employees also identified inefficient and unproductive work rules or policies, with some continuing for extended periods, which created lower morale and decreased output. For example, some foremen had their workers produce ashtrays or other items out of scrap material to make them look busy. The workers believed they were made to do this so that they would not be transferred out of a

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March 1944, 16 February 1944, 19 January 1944, 8 March 1944, and 17 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 19 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; grievance cases, 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 15; G. L. rep. Fagan to State Headquarters for Selective Service, 17 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 13; NWLB Chair William Davis to L. 776-A V.P. W. O. Wood, 15 July 1944, UTASC, AR 48 box 3, folder 24.

department, because then a foreman might be under greater stress when more work finally made its way into his section.<sup>88</sup>

One type of grievance that showed the pressure on workers for higher productivity was the lack of vacation time or pay. CVAC had a vacation policy that allowed workers to receive time off or the equivalent in wages after the person had worked there for a specified amount of time without an extended leave of absence. The union believed that this policy fell within the purview of working conditions, so it took complaints to management under the established grievance procedure. The reasons workers usually requested a leave of absence were health problems, a family member suffering an illness, or some other type of family emergency. The specifics of the company policy changed over time. At times the company only allowed ten days absence, and at other times it allowed for a period of up to thirty days. In May 1944 CVAC changed the policy to require workers to work for a full year before qualifying for vacation benefits, whereas previously a worker accrued vacation time of one day per month worked.<sup>89</sup>

The union also took on cases where an employee had not received the proper amount of benefits within the prevailing rules. In one set of cases about two hundred employees had been laid off from June 1943 to April 1944 and were promised by their foremen that upon returning their vacation time would remain intact, but when the

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<sup>88</sup> Grievance cases, 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 15; D. L. correspondence, 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 10; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 7 April 1944 and 17 February 1944; D. L. Grievance Committee minutes, 20 April 1944; Plant Protection Committee to "Fellow Workers," 23 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 20.

workers returned to work, the company told them they were classified as rehires, thus eliminating their vacation time. The company eventually reinstated their benefits, though, agreeing with the union that if the foremen told them they would not lose their vacation benefits, even though the foremen were mistaken, then the company should live up to what the foremen said. Almost certainly the company limited vacation benefits to increase the productivity of the workforce (by forcing more work from them) and to increase profitability (by decreasing wage payments).<sup>90</sup>

The situation at the CVAC plant in Fort Worth by the summer of 1944 was not one of mass discontent and upheaval, yet neither was it one of relative satisfaction and passivity. Looking at the grievances and complaints of the union against CVAC demonstrated this well. Some workers in fact held strong feelings against CVAC. One former union member wrote to his old friends at D. L. 776 and referred to the company as “that gang of cut throats.” There were enough problems for CVAC employees, dealing mostly with wages and mistreatment by management, that many workers supported the union. New members continued to join the union but the total number of dues-paying members continued to drop, though only slightly, through the first half of 1944. This lack of members created an additional problem for the district and local lodges—declining finances to conduct union affairs. The Machinists looked to securing a contract as the best

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<sup>89</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 26 May 1944.

<sup>90</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 19 January 1944, 9 February 1944, and 8 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 28 April 1944, 19 May 1944, and 7 April 1944.

way to remedy a number of problems and induce employees to join the union in large numbers.<sup>91</sup>

As with most other American unions at the time, District Lodge 776 relied heavily on the federal government to provide the means and enforcement mechanisms for obtaining a collective bargaining agreement. But again reflecting the experience of many labor unions, the Fort Worth Machinists showed clear signs of resentment toward this situation. They cried injustice at the RWLB's unfavorable decision on the contract, and they deplored the long delay in correcting the matter. Furthermore, the union joined labor's attack on the government for not allowing higher wage increases. Labor leaders expected incomes to be contained in accordance with the inflationary effects on the cost of living, and when they were not, unions pointed to the War Labor Boards as the enforcers of this unfair policy. Lodge 776 admitted that the Boards had proved beneficial in some cases around the country, but in most of these wage increases occurred only when the employer was especially reactionary or when workers were leaving in large numbers. Overall the union inveighed against the NWLB as an institution designed to

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<sup>91</sup> G. L. rep. C. Z. Lindsey to Lauderman, 13 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 20; William Puckett to Sodd, 3 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 10 (quotation); Smith, business agent's weekly report, January to May 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 22; Sodd to Hewitt correspondence, January to June 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 16; Sodd to G. L. Sec.-Treas. E. C. Davison, 18 January 1944, 7 April 1944, and 8 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 6; D. L. 776 bank statements, 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 9;



prevent higher wages. What made this situation especially intolerable was that at the same time wages were frozen corporate profits had soared to spectacular levels.<sup>92</sup>

After continued delay on District Lodge 776's case, the NWLB finally sent the contract to the National Airframe Panel in January 1944. The NAP had a similar structure as the NWLB with representatives from management, labor, and the public. As with the Board, the Panel was to consider the disputed areas of the contract, hold hearings if it decided that was necessary, and make a final report on its decisions. Eager to put the contract in place, the Machinists in Fort Worth planned to send a local representative to help the Grand Lodge in its proceedings before the NAP in Washington D. C. Eventually, the union elected Smith to go to the capital. During IAM preparations in February, Smith reported to the District Lodge that favorable decisions in IAM cases from other cities, as well as the excellent work done by IAM officials, boded well for them.<sup>93</sup>

In the middle of February, the NAP held hearings in which the IAM and CVAC presented their arguments concerning the remaining disputed areas in the contract. Smith and two Grand Lodge representatives appeared for the union, and Jim Hassler and three company attorneys appeared for CVAC. The union presented its case first, and then the company responded. On the five main issues—union security, joint wage review, wages,

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<sup>92</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 23 February 1944 and 16 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 17 February 1944 and 11 August 1944; *Machinists Monthly Journal*, December 1943.

<sup>93</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 23 February 1944, 5 January 1944, and 1 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; Smith to Brown, 17 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 13; D. L. 766 minutes, 18 December 1943, and 23 January 1944, UTASC,

retroactive pay, and the grievance procedure—the two sides made the same basic arguments they had before the Dallas RWLB. The union again demanded stronger procedures for union security and the grievance procedure. IAM officials requested an irrevocable dues check-off upon hiring for the maintenance of membership policy—nearly a union shop measure—and they again asked to make the grievance process less susceptible to management manipulation. The attitude of the NAP toward the long delay in settling the contract disputes convinced the union that its case would be settled relatively quickly, and it hoped for a decision within forty days.<sup>94</sup>

The Fort Worth Machinists instead received an NAP order in March to negotiate over the grievance procedure.<sup>95</sup> Both sides were ordered to begin talks in late March and finish by 22 April. Smith and a committee of local union leaders achieved some success in making a few favorable changes, but they failed to get the company to agree on two aspects of the procedure. The company accepted increasing the number of shop committeemen to one for every two hundred employees and with every department required to have at least one union representative. CVAC also agreed to some restrictions on the transfer of shop committeemen. In addition management accepted stronger

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AR 48, box 1, folder 21; Smith to Sodd, 11 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 7; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 16 February 1944.

<sup>94</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 23 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; National Airframe Panel report, 21 June 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 24.

<sup>95</sup> Smith had actually been notified by H. A. Shraeder, Director of Research for the Grand Lodge, that this decision was coming, and also that the requested wage scales would be approved but that the joint wage review would be rejected. Shraeder had found this out secretly, though, and so he requested that Smith not divulge this information to

guarantees on moving the complaint up through higher levels of management to a joint labor-management committee and finally to arbitration. Finally, the company accepted a requirement that it inform employees of the reasons for their termination in writing. In return the union agreed to certain time limitations within which complaints could be handled. One such time limit remained in dispute, though. The Machinists initially wanted the time limit for final decisions in the Labor-Management Committee on a grievance to be unlimited but then compromised on two working days, while the company wanted the limit to be one and a half days. Another unresolved issue was the proper agent for arbitration proceedings. The company wanted to use the RWLB and split the costs with the union. The union protested that this could make the costs prohibitively high. In some cases the cost of an arbitrator for two weeks time was one thousand dollars. The union wanted to use the Department of Labor since it had a free arbitration mechanism through the U. S. Conciliation Service. The company countered that unless the union was made to pay in some fashion, nothing would stop it from taking every grievance to arbitration. The negotiators then sent the unfinished agreement back to the NAP for final consideration.<sup>96</sup>

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anyone. See Shraeder and Lindsey to Smith, 16 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 4.

<sup>96</sup> NAP report, 21 June 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 24; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 31 March 1944, 14 April 1944, 21 April 1944, and 5 May 1944 ; Smith to G. E. Mason, 15 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 7; copy of the grievance procedure agreed to by the Negotiations Committee of D. L. 776, 8 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 20; IAM lawyer John Graelis to NWLB headquarters, 24 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3 folder 20.

The union hoped again to receive a directive from the NWLB ordering the implementation of the contract after this round of talks. When this did not happen, it considered striking to force the issue. Although the lodge gave strong support to the no-strike pledge, it had also on a number of occasions in its literature expressed support to unions who had struck in extreme conditions where corporations had deliberately, according to the union, taken advantage of its employees. The union's patience had run out. At a Lodge 776-A meeting on 8 May, nearly all members in attendance voted in favor of petitioning the Regional NLRB for a strike vote under the conditions of the Smith-Connally law. At its 15 May meeting Lodge 776-B voted to support the day lodge's decision, and on 16 May the union filed a strike petition. The local union leaders described rampant dissatisfaction among employees due to a lack of consistent and well-known wage scales and workplace rules. They claimed company tried, and continued to try, to delay implementation of the contract by making appeals to the Board for further consideration of CVAC's position. In a story in *Plane Facts*, the union attacked the company for using "delay, defiance, and deception" in resisting the Machinists.<sup>97</sup>

Local lodge officials tried to stand their ground in accord with the wishes of the active rank-and-file membership in planning to go through with the strike vote although they faced mounting pressure from the Grand Lodge and the government to withdraw it. Smith had requested the advice of the national union on their situation, and the Grand

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<sup>97</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 12 May 1944 and 26 May 1944; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 5 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; Lodge 776-B minutes, 15 May 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 21.

Lodge responded that it wished the local would wait only a little while longer for the NWLB to make its final decision. The union had in fact gotten word that the continued delay was caused by unexpected overtime work by the NAP on a West Coast aircraft case. The Panel would not be able to rule on the Fort Worth case until the other case was finished. The Department of Labor sent Edwin Flumey as a labor conciliator to Fort Worth on 25 May to try to work out a settlement. Lodge 776 declared it would not bow to pressure, though, as it believed the strike vote would pass overwhelmingly. Although some union leaders believed the government might take over the plant if a strike was called, they also thought this might actually expedite the contract directive. The lodge cited the testimony of U. S. Conciliation Service Director John Steelman's testimony before Congress to support its stand. He had stated that many disputes in industry had been caused by poor handling of labor cases by the war agencies. It also reported that Flumey declared that the union was not at fault for the current situation.<sup>98</sup>

Despite their purported resolve to go forward with the vote, District Lodge officials eventually withdrew the petition. Without authorization from or prior notice given to Lodge 776, a Grand Lodge representative withdrew the petition. Once the lodge found out, it contacted the Grand Lodge and had the withdrawal revoked. The date for the vote then moved from 15 June to 19 June. Communications with the Grand Lodge continued on the progress of its case, and apparently convinced that a decision would be made soon, and almost certainly caving in to the pressure from the government and the

Grand Lodge that a strike would not help their situation, advice that may have been correct, Smith officially withdrew the petition on 17 June.<sup>99</sup>

But pressure from the rank and file did not easily fade away. The withdrawal of the strike petition demonstrated that the union leaders were unwilling to push the strength of the union beyond the boundaries of what the government commanded. Their reaction to internal strains displayed their attitudes toward potential destabilizing currents within the union. During this crisis the writers of *Plane Facts* attempted to deflect criticism of the union for the delays. They said, with some justification, that they were doing everything they could in face of CVAC's resistance and the government's sluggish progress. Yet after the petition had been withdrawn, they went so far as to harbor and cultivate suspicions that the critics may have been company spies out to divide and weaken the union. Many local union leaders experienced similar dilemmas during the war years. It was to their advantage to cultivate militancy at certain times to provide them with greater bargaining power with the company or with government officials. At some point, however, they needed to restrain the rank and file's ferment, fearing further agitation could lead to destructive factionalism, disintegration of their power, and a government backlash.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Smith to Brown, 9 May 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 21; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 19 May 1944, 2 June 1944, and 9 June 1944.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 June 1944, and 9 June 1944.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, business agent's weekly report, January to June 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 6; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 16 June 1944.

The NAP recommendations arrived in Fort Worth in the last week of June and provided the union with concrete evidence that the contract was only weeks away from implementation. The Panel requested comments on its draft within ten days to help clarify any confusing or ambiguous phrases and to correct any errors. After this period the union anticipated that the NWLB would make its final directive order, and within several weeks the proper personnel would be in place to enforce the contract. As the lodge had expected, the recommendations more or less favored the union in all disputed areas except on the joint wage review issue. On the union security issue, the Panel recommended, with industry members dissenting, that barring evidence of irresponsibility by the IAM the union should have the standard maintenance of membership clause with a voluntary irrevocable dues check-off and the right to withdraw on fifteen days notice. On the issue of joint wage review, the Panel stated that the NWLB had consistently decided that such policies were solely the prerogative of management. Even though it acknowledged evidence that such joint review boards had worked, the panel recommended, this time with labor members dissenting, against the union demand. Instead it recommended the company counterproposal where the company agreed to give periodic reviews and to explain in writing to the employee any decision regarding the granting or denial of a wage increase. This was contingent on CVAC still accepting this determination, which it eventually did not. The Panel recommended the SCAI plan on wages and classifications, which the company was now willing to accept. Most of the specifics were to correspond with plans sent to two Dallas-Ft. Worth aircraft companies, but some were left open for

CVAC and the IAM to work out. The Panel stated that the Board's policy regarding retroactive pay had been to set it to the date when the NWLB certified the case. This set the date to May 5, 1943. On the two still disputed areas of the grievance procedure, the NAP recommended that there be no time limit for the Plant Grievance Committee—made up of three union and three company representatives—to reach its decisions but that the employee representatives only be paid for two working days. The Panel also recommended that the cost of arbitration, whatever form it took, should be shared equally by both parties.<sup>101</sup>

The company and the union responded to the NWLB about the contract. This time the union was the party who was more or less pleased with the ruling, while the company protested that the arrangement would bring great hardship upon it. The Machinists asked for a few changes in the grievance procedure, for example that the number of shop committeemen pertain to each shift, and for other small changes to job and wage classifications of certain workers and the language of the union security clause. With these requested changes the Fort Worth local again attempted to create uniform contracts for all IAM locals at CVAC plants. On the joint wage review the union provided a lengthy critique which will be treated in detail later. While the union viewed the decision as a victory and as a significant step toward fairness and justice for CVAC employees, company officials no doubt did believe the order would seriously damage their ability to run the business profitably. The implementation of the report meant greater labor costs



and less control over the workforce. In its petition CVAC argued that the decision of the RWLB in Dallas was fair and that the ensuing changes should be overturned. CVAC claimed that the union's attempts at standardizing IAM contracts throughout the industry were misguided. Especially with the grievance procedure and wages, CVAC claimed that management needed the authority to handle local circumstances differently. CVAC's effort to alter the Board's decision at this stage showed that the company would not easily accept orders with which it did not agree. This behavior continued through the end of the war.<sup>102</sup>

The NWLB handed down its directive order in the first part of August that corresponded to the final NAP report, minus the wage review recommendation, and required the company and the union to sign it within a short period of time. After some delay, IAM and CVAC officials signed the contract in late August. Several Grand Lodge officials aided in the process of implementing the contract. One important person in this group was C. Z. Lindsey, who had helped out in negotiations with CVAC before and who specialized in assisting local unions in putting their contracts into force. The work that the IAM had ahead of it included setting up the grievance procedure, filling the required positions with committeemen, working out the classifications of employees, and devising a scheme for back pay. The union called upon its members to get involved in

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<sup>101</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 30 June 1944; NAP report, 21 June 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 24.

<sup>102</sup> IAM comments on NWLB case in Shraeder correspondence, 13 July 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 4; CVAC petition to the NAP, 14 July 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 24; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 28 July 1944.

implementing the contract and to let the non-members know about the benefits of the contract in order to encourage them to join. Many members heeded this call and filled a District Lodge meeting in August. Union officers explained the contract provisions, and the group began setting up committees to carry out the work of enforcing it. The District Lodge also informed workers that they should rely only on union officers or group committeemen for accurate information about the contract and not to take seriously some of the unfounded rumors spreading around. Once again, the union made appeals to non-members to join the union, to share the cost of its benefits, and to not be a free rider.<sup>103</sup>

As long as the war continued, the government, in dealing with labor disputes, put its highest priority on continued production. Given rank and file dissatisfaction over problems with management, local union officials were put in a difficult position. They needed rank and file support to pressure CVAC and the government to grant the union more favors, and union leaders tried to obtain this support by distributing its newspaper, resolving shop-floor complaints, and securing an acceptable contract. Yet, as was the case with the strike threat in May 1944, when rank-and-file members turned to disruptive action, or they threatened it, union officials believed that this would probably bring more harm than good. Again, within the context that local union leaders worked, to seek government involvement was the most practical and safest way to address the union's difficulties. Although rank-and-file participation was crucial in advancing the union's

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<sup>103</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 11 August 1944, 18 August 1944, 25 August 1944, 1 September 1944, and, 28 July 1944.

causes, union officials repeatedly turned to the government to redress its most substantial grievances.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTING THE CONTRACT: SUMMER 1944 TO SPRING 1945

Although obtaining a decent contract in the Summer of 1944, especially with wage gains, and provisions for fairer work rules, helped to gain support and members, the determination of CVAC management to control conditions on the shop floor, at times to discriminate against union members, and overall to combat the union any way it could, threatened to derail the union's efforts. Due to these kinds of actions by management, many employees did not want to join the Machinists because they did not think the union could help much in correcting unfair treatment or because they feared discrimination by management, among other reasons. In this chapter, it will be shown to what extent the union was able to benefit and protect its members once the contract was put in place, and how union officials attempted to deal with continuing problems with management.

The union hoped the contract provisions would be in full force by September. An early meeting among Smith and Lindsey and company officials to work out the details of the contract and how to implement it initially gave the union optimism. CVAC officers had acted in a cooperative fashion, and they said they were beginning an educational campaign to ensure that supervisors and other personnel were familiar with the contract. The NWLB order did mandate that the company print copies for its supervisors, so they could not claim ignorance. The union began a similar campaign with its staff and

committeemen. Lindsey predicted that some differences would arise over interpretation that may need to go to grievance procedure or arbitration. He emphasized the need for patience and toleration on both sides to understand and implement the contract properly. This type of optimism was short lived. Although both sides probably believed they were fulfilling their obligations under the agreement, over time the union saw the company as trying to weaken the content of various contract clauses. By mid-September the actions of CVAC personnel showed to the union that they wanted to make the process as difficult as possible.<sup>104</sup>

One example of such obstruction occurred in union membership drives. The company did not allow the union to distribute membership applications because it claimed the contract forbade the union “to distribute literature, handbills or printed matter on company property without the consent of the company,” which it did. The union had not been able to win greater control over the distribution of its literature, but it claimed this was not meant to extend to applications. Shortly after union protests, the company agreed to allow the distribution of membership blanks, but it continued to impede the union’s growth by not fully complying with the maintenance-of-membership policy. The District Lodge sent a list of all members to CVAC and the amount to deduct from their paycheck for dues. That sum was then supposed to be turned over to the union treasury with the workers credited for dues payment. Beginning in the fall of 1944 and continuing through the spring of 1945, the Machinists tried to get the company to abide by these

rules, but the company failed to meet them. This was a direct attack on the power of the union and its legal rights to self-preservation, and it threatened to go to the RWLB or other government agencies to seek compliance. CVAC and the union remained in a protracted struggle over additional issues of back pay, wages and classification, wage reviews, the grievance procedure, vacation, and other matters.<sup>105</sup>

The matter of paying workers retroactive wages in line with the new wage scales from May 1943 to August of 1944 created practical difficulties. The union believed there were two basic ways this could be done. One was to pay every worker what he or she should have gotten, but this would take an enormous amount of time considering the thousands of employee records that would have to be reviewed. The other much easier option would be to calculate an average amount that each worker would have received and pay each employee that amount. In late August members voted for the second method at a District Lodge meeting. In order for a worker to receive back pay, he needed to apply for it by the end of October, unless a just cause could be proven for missing the deadline. Otherwise, the company was under no obligation to make the payment. The average amount worked out to be fifty-seven cents per week per worker, which totaled about forty dollars or an extra week's pay. The union expected to have employees begin receiving their checks by October, but not until December did the first checks go out.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 1 September 1944, 8, September 1944, and 22 September 1944.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 September 1944, 29 September 1944, and 20 October 1944; Lindsey to Smith, 5 February 1945, UTASC, AR 48, box 4 folder 17.

<sup>106</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 7 July 1944, 1 September 1944, and 8 December 1944.

Persistence by union officials and members also paid off in achieving fair adjustments on wage classifications. The company was supposed to use the SCAI classifications ordered by the NWLB in placing workers into job categories. Within these slots were three grades with a maximum and minimum wage range for each. Rumors had spread that this process would mean lower wages for certain workers, some reportedly circulated by foremen. But the union made it clear that the directive order mandated that no employees would be downgraded or receive a pay cut. If a worker was not satisfied with the classification given to him, he they could take it through the grievance procedure. Union officials encouraged workers to press their case if they were displeased. They assumed that the company would not treat everyone fairly since this would keep labor costs down. By mid-October most people had received their new wage category, upon which the *Plane Facts* reported “as has been anticipated, astonishment, dissatisfaction, and strenuous objection has been voiced by workers.” Hundreds of workers filed grievances protesting unfair treatment. To the surprise of the union leaders many of these complaints were dealt with quickly, and by the end of October they and the company had resolved over seven hundred cases to the benefit of the workers. Part of the reason for this may have been that after IAM made a protest to CVAC headquarters, the head of its Industrial Relations Department arrived in Fort Worth at this time and told management to clean up the mess of grievances.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 25 August 1944, 22 September 1944, 29 September 1944, 6 October 1944, 13 October 1944, 20 October 1944, and 27 October 1944.

Not everyone who had a classification grievance easily obtained favorable results. A group of employees in Department 31 stopped work in October over mistreatment by their foreman. Almost all the workers in this department were IAM members, and they had tried to get their classifications changed through the regular grievance procedure. Their foreman attempted to stop them from handling this outside his authority, and he threatened to fire their group committeeman, C. D. Clotz, for doing grievance work that was protected by the contract. The foreman had a history of this type of threatening behavior. The workers halted work and countered that if the foreman did fire Clotz he would have to fire them all. Clotz contacted the Industrial Relations Department, which then supported the employees and promised they would have their complaints settled within the proper procedures. Unionists continued to complain about a few hard-headed foreman, and several classification cases went to arbitration as late as the spring of 1945, but no major incident or buildup of grievances occurred again. In fact, a few weeks after the work stoppage, CVAC agreed to allow group committeemen to view the employment records of employees when grieving a classification.<sup>108</sup>

Connected to the issue of initial classifications of employees was the matter of wage increases within that classification or promotions to higher paid classifications. The union hoped to be able to address these concerns through a joint wage review board, but the NWLB order did not include it. The Grand Lodge requested that the Board hold a public hearing on this issue since it was of such vital interest to the Machinists and to the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 3 November 1944, 17 November 1944, 6 April 1945, and 11 May 1945.



whole country. The IAM had a joint review board at the San Diego CVAC plant. They hoped to use evidence from there and other locations to show that a joint review worked well in San Diego and that it was needed elsewhere. Smith and presidents from West Coast lodges went to Washington, D. C. to testify with Grand Lodge officers to the Board the last week in August. The unionists declared that this procedure fell within labor's legal rights to bargain over wages. The IAM also argued that secretive deliberations by management tended to lead to discrimination of one sort or another, and they provided evidence of just such unjust actions by management. Furthermore, they claimed that by opening up the review process with a fair hearing and union participation this would lead to greater morale and less time spent on grievances over promotions and raises with the San Diego lodge testifying on the merits of the latter. CVAC officials disputed these claims and insisted on their right to control wage review decisions. They emphasized that contrary to the San Diego lodges assertions the San Diego review board had caused disruptions and discrimination against non-union employees. The IAM hoped the Board would rule for wage review boards to be set up in all CVAC plants, but it did not. The Grand Lodge charged the company with falsifying information to the NWLB and tried to bring a complaint against it which again brought no results.<sup>109</sup>

District Lodge 776 filed a separate petition with the NWLB to obtain a joint review board, and the NWLB handed down its decision on November 30. The order did

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<sup>109</sup> Shraeder to NAP Chairman Benjamin Aaron, 13 July 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 4; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 25 August 1944, 1 September 1944, and 15

not grant the union's request, and it basically mandated what the NAP had recommended in its summer report to become part of the contract. Although it was a small victory, the union was happy to get what it could. The NWLB instructed the company to have employee reviews every six months, and it could unilaterally decide whether to give merit increases or not. The reason for the decisions would be given to the union and employee in writing, and the union could file grievances when they thought the company's decision was unfair. CVAC officials objected to the whole decision and continued to resist union incursions into this domain.<sup>110</sup>

The Machinists also confronted the company over violations of failing to follow the proper grievance procedure. In one instance group committeeman E. L. Johnson was fired for not being at his work station. Johnson had been filling out a grievance report and did not report this to his foreman, which the company claimed was the cause for the dismissal. The union took the case to arbitration, and the arbiter decided in favor of Johnson since CVAC's demand that committeemen inform supervisors of their whereabouts at all times was not part of the contract. The union also agreed try to persuade committeemen to notify their foremen of their whereabouts.<sup>111</sup>

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September 1944; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 25 August 1944; Shraeder to Smith, 31 July 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 4.

<sup>110</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 11 August 1944, 5 January 1945, and 9 March 1945; NWLB case 111-1468-D, 30 November 1944, *Labor Relations Reference Manual: The Law and the Facts of Labor Relations* (Washington, D. C.: The Bureau of National Affairs, 1946), 15: 1747, 16: 1799.

<sup>111</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 3 November 1944 and 15 September 1944.

Union members charged foremen with a number of other violations. They reported that foremen were telling workers to withdraw their grievances to get them settled quicker, but in fact this action made it impossible to grieve the complaint. Workers charged that foremen who intimidated them into not filing grievances threatened them with pay cuts, refusal of pay raises, or transfer to a less desirable job. Union officials charged some foremen with abusing their authority in handing out green slips, official reprimands that were filed with an employee's work record. These foremen purportedly gave out green slips for the slightest cause, often not informing the employee of the action. Since workers could be fired for a certain number of green slips, foremen often held these over an employees' head to keep him in line. The union saw this as an especially gross misuse of power to prevent workers from receiving fair treatment on the job. They threatened not to acknowledge the legitimacy of the infraction reports until a procedure was developed for informing the worker of the cause and the time of each incident.<sup>112</sup>

Workers and the union confronted various other problems in their relations with management during the first year with a contract. Among the more numerous complaints were ones over seniority violations in transfers, absences, vacation benefits, layoffs, wrongful discharge, and unfair treatment by foremen. On the latter problems the union charged the company with "sweeping people out the back door," that is, with firing, laying off, or transferring certain undesirable workers to bring in favorites of management

or new hires. Other times the union believed the cause of the problems were due to foremen acting “to satisfy a petty spite or some other self-interest purpose.” A number of these complaints went to arbitration where the union again won favorable rulings in most cases. Grand Lodge Representative Lindsey still made periodic visits to Fort Worth to aid the union in talks with CVAC officials over differences in interpreting and implementing portions of the contract through the spring of 1945.<sup>113</sup>

The union had supported the efforts of some workers outside the bargaining unit to join the Machinists since 1943, and several groups were incorporated into District Lodge 776 by the end of 1945. The local union did not face competition from CIO unions after the first years of the war, and this situation solidified when the IAM and UAW national leaders signed a no-raid agreement in early 1944. What this meant was that the two unions would not try to organize any workers at an industrial site where the other already had an established bargaining unit. When new groups of workers joined the union through expansion of the bargaining unit, this process usually followed a pattern. The workers expressed interest in becoming part of the bargaining unit, and the IAM gathered evidence of this through card signings or other means. The District Lodge then went to the NLRB to present the required *prima facie* evidence of interest in the union by the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 27 October 1944, 5 January 1945, 12 January 1945, 10 November 1944, 24 November 1944, and 8 December 1944.

<sup>113</sup> Smith to Lindsey, 22 November 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 20; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 10 November 1944, 15 September 1944, 13 October 1944, 18 August 1944, 22 September 1944, 29 September 1944, 3 November 1944, 23 February 1945, 6 April 1945, 11 May 1945, 27 April 1945, 23 March 1945, and 2 March 1945; Lindsey to Smith, 27 December 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 20.

employees, and the NLRB supervised a certification election. Inspectors voted themselves into the union in April 1944, timekeepers did so in March 1945, and tool planners, tool designers, and tool liaison employees voted affirmatively in November 1945. In one case the union petitioned the NWLB and the NLRB to order a group of office workers in by claiming they should have been included in the original order rather than attempt to have an election. "Department clerks working in the factory in connection with production and control records" were ordered in by the beginning of 1945, but the NLRB did not include other departmental office workers who had access to personnel or other confidential files.<sup>114</sup>

The internal organization of the union underwent changes with the arrival of the contract and the new developments of labor-management relations. The growth of the union pressured the two local unions to create their own business agents. In the fall of 1944, Lodge 776-A and 776-B elected W. J. Braune and W. O. Wood respectively to this position. These two men had been machinists and IAM members since 1916 and had previously held positions in their locals. Also in April 1945, Bill Sodd was called into

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<sup>114</sup> Smith to G. L. rep. C. L. Mulholland, 24 August 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 7; Smith to H. D. Wills, 1 September 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 10; Fagan to Brown, 30 November 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 13; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 20 January 1944, 5 January 1944, 31 March 1944, 21 April 1944, 26 January 1944, 9 March 1945, 16 March 1945, 20 April 1945, 12 November 1945, 17 November 1944, and 27 April 1945; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 11 January 1944 and 17 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; Edwin Elliot to Smith, 22 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 7; D. L. minutes, 16 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 11; NLRB, Decisions and Orders, 55: 577-81, 60: 525-29, 61: 869-71, 64: 400-05; Lindsey to Aaron, 11 May 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 20; G. L. rep. W. G. Flynn to Smith, 6

military service, and E. P. Fortner took over as District Lodge Secretary-Treasurer. Fortner had worked several years at CVAC as a milling machine operator and union member, and he had prior bookkeeping and accountant experience.<sup>115</sup>

Although the higher local officials tended to be experienced and qualified IAM members, the Machinists had a more difficult time filling the ranks of the shop committeemen with a competent crew. Much of the problem stemmed from the large number of positions and the significant amount of knowledge about the contract and working conditions at CVAC that shop committeemen were required to have in order to do an adequate job. These people were on the front line of confrontation with the company. The obstructive and hostile attitude by many people in management, as has been discussed earlier, made committeemen's job all the more demanding. In addition, they were under pressure from the top and the bottom of the union as the business agents complained that the committeemen did not take proper procedures in filing grievances and some in the rank-and-file accused them of being too lenient with foremen. By February 1945 the union set out to improve the committeemen's service to the members by having them attend classes on industrial relations.<sup>116</sup>

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December 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 7; CVAC petition to NWLB, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 24.

<sup>115</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 8 September 1944, 13 October 1944, 15 September 1944, 27 April 1945, 6 April 1945, 13 April 1945, 20 April 1945, 10 November 1944, 8 December 1944, and 5 January 1945.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 July 1944, 17 November 1944, 9 February 1945, and 9 March 1945, 13 October 1944, and 8 December 1944.

Despite all the problems the union faced from the fall of 1944 to the spring of 1945, the Fort Worth Machinists and CVAC workers definitely made progress toward greater strength as a union, toward improving the working conditions and lives of CVAC employees, and toward fulfilling their role as an integral part of Americas war machine. More than twenty-five thousand bombers had been built by the Fort Worth plant by November 1944 when they stopped producing B-24s and began to concentrate on B-32 long-range bombers. The Fort Worth plant contributed significantly to the over two million man-hours saved due to employee suggestions at CVAC plants nationwide according to Chief Industrial Engineer D. J. Clow. The War Production Board rated the plant high for production performance and commended the IAM for its role in the massive expansion of the aircraft industry.<sup>117</sup>

The local union was also an important part of the proliferation of labor organizations in aircraft industries throughout the country. By the fall of 1944, 85 percent of all aircraft workers were represented by unions with 65 percent covered by collective bargaining agreements. The IAM represented about half of all of these workers. The District Lodge claimed it was the largest union in north Texas and that the IAM contained the largest collection of union members throughout the state. IAM unions in Fort Worth, of which D. L. 776 was the largest, were one of the largest concentrations of union members in cities of comparable size in the United States. District Lodge 776 claimed

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<sup>117</sup> Barksdale, *The Genesis of the Aviation Industry in North Texas*, 11; Oliver Knight, *Fort Worth: Outpost on the Trinity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,

about seven thousand members in May 1945. The African-American local continued to grow and had hopes of organizing most black employees. For these and other workers the union helped raise wages and provided greater security and fairness on their jobs. In a gesture of appreciation toward veterans, returning servicemen received special treatment from the union with reinstatement, retaining their old jobs, and training.<sup>118</sup>

The local union also boasted that its newspaper was the only paper owned and published by a labor union in Texas. It also claimed that the readership continued to grow, even outside of District Lodge 776, and that it was labor's voice in northeast Texas. The Machinists' pride in its paper also stemmed from its coverage of not only local, state, and national union affairs but also a broad range of issues including local, state, and national political and economic news. The paper was not nearly as thorough as the large mainstream newspapers, so it was best used as a supplement to other news sources.<sup>119</sup>

Still the Fort Worth Machinists had created, as the paper often reminded its readers, a real working-class alternative to the corporate-dominated media. One theme the paper returned to often was how the mainstream press made headline news out of labor strikes and problems yet gave little coverage to the reports of obstruction by businesses. The paper even went so far as to claim the major press outlets used fascist techniques of

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1953), 215-17; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 28 August 1945, 22 November 1944, and 1 August 1944; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 14 December 1944 and 24 February 1944.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 8 September 1944, 1 September 1944, 25 May 1945, and 27 April 1945; Perlman, *The Machinists*, 205-13; list of D. L. 776 members in the military, 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 16; apprenticeship program packet, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 12; *Machinists Monthly Journal*, April 1944.

<sup>119</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 25 May 1945 and 26 January 1945.



distortion, misrepresentation, and propaganda to support conservative and anti-labor politics. *Plane Facts* provided its readership with numerous stories on businesses that defrauded the government or refused to fulfill government orders on labor issues. The union used these stories to portray the nefarious and dishonorable acts of corporations. It also used them to tarnish the reputation of big business and to demonstrate that corporations were a much greater threat to the war effort and the well being of the country than the few worker-created problems. *Plane Facts* also printed numerous stories in which government officials praised labor's achievements. These reports provided workers with information about the war that they may not have otherwise heard, showed workers that labor's efforts were paying off and that government officials recognized this, and countered the notion floated in the mainstream press and elsewhere that labor was not doing as good a job as it should.<sup>120</sup>

District Lodge 776 made contacts with other Texas unions through its paper and also by joining with them in several federated labor organizations. IAM members throughout Texas organized the State Council of Machinists in the fall of 1943. The group's main purpose was to help coordinate the efforts of IAM unions and to promote their interests. Most of what they accomplished during the war years was to formalize statewide contacts and to help ensure, along with the Grand Lodge, that the unions had access to information and resources to aid their members and organizations. District

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 24 March 1944, 31 March 1944, 13 July 1945, 27 October 1944, 10 August 1945, and 9 June 1944; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 11 January 1944, 19 January 1944, and 8 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19;

Lodge 776 joined in 1943 and sent representatives to the semiannual meetings with J. D. Smith serving as their region's vice president.<sup>121</sup>

It is not clear from the record what kind of relationship the union had with other AFL unions in the state. Nationwide jurisdiction conflicts with the AFL Carpenters and the Operating Engineers unions caused the IAM to threaten to leave the AFL during the war years. The Machinists continued to have strained relations with the executive council of the AFL and AFL unions for many years. Still District Lodge 776 joined the Texas State Federation of Labor in September of 1944, and it also joined the Fort Worth Trades Assembly in early 1945. Smith and Gauthier served on committees in the Assembly at this time, but the union appears to have dropped out of involvement after a few months, perhaps due to continuing jurisdiction conflicts with other AFL unions.<sup>122</sup>

Although the union claimed optimism after the NWLB contract order, CVAC management actions quickly disabused it of such notions. The union overcame management obstruction of membership drives, maintenance-of-membership compliance,

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<sup>121</sup> D. L. 776 minutes, 19 September 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 21; Texas State Council of Machinists convention report, 2-3 October 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 17; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 5 January 1944 and 19 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 20 January 1944, 12 May 1944, 19 May 1944, and 15 September 1944; Smith, "Report For Meeting of Executive Board, Texas State Council of Machinists," 23 June 1945, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 21.

<sup>122</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 22 June 1945, 6 July 1945, and 18 August 1944; Mark Perlman, *The Machinists*, 100-05; Fort Worth Trades Assembly financial records, 1941-1956, UTASC, AR 2, box 6 folders 2 and 3; Fort Worth Trades Assembly minutes, 1942-1945, UTASC, AR 2, box 6, folder 9; *Union Banner*, 1943-1946. Although District Lodge documents contain information regarding the split with the AFL and jurisdictional conflicts on a national level, they do not contain any information on local jurisdiction problems.

retroactive pay, and wages and classifications orders only after appealing to the NWLB for enforcement, and at times without fully satisfactory results. The union achieved less success in forcing the company to follow the correct grievance procedure, to provide fair treatment on the shop floor, and to correct other problems for union members. In the cases it took to the RWLB, the union fared well, but many problems went unreported, or the union was not able to compile proper evidence to bring a grievance case before the Board and hope to win. While urging its members to resolve disputes at the workplace as best they could, the union relied on government agencies to remedy its most difficult conflicts with management. Although many workers remained unhappy, discontent lessened slightly after the contract was put in place. The union claimed responsibility not only for boosting morale, but also for contributing to the war effort and the spread of unions in the mass-production industries. The union provided real gains for CVAC employees with higher wages and more protection on the job. And the Machinists provided an important organizational and educational tool to working-class people in Fort Worth through its newspaper. In spite of the progress the union had made during the war, the end of hostilities in Europe in May 1945 and in the Pacific in August 1945 brought waves of layoffs that caused turmoil for the union and its members.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE END OF THE WAR AND THE INITIAL POSTWAR CONFLICTS:

#### MAY 1945 TO 1946

When the war in Europe came to an end, serious labor-management conflict erupted that would not calm down until well after the war with Japan ended. The layoffs that accompanied cutbacks in military orders brought on a whole series of difficult situations that tested whether the union could hold its ground. Also, negotiations over a new contract began in the fall of 1945 with both the union and the company geared for a fight. CVAC attempted to erode the strength the union had acquired during the war, while the union looked to advancing its powers and obtaining more benefits for CVAC employees. After the war in the Pacific concluded in August 1945, the union stopped merely threatening to strike and started to act on those threats. A three-month-long walkout in 1946 resulted in less than a total victory for the union, but it was a victory nonetheless.

Union leaders had feared throughout the war that its end would bring a postwar recession, and they watched developments that could lead that way. As early as the spring of 1944, labor leaders saw emerging large scale layoffs as a sign of worse times ahead and hoped that strong unions could help guarantee good jobs after the war. In August 1944, after the Office of War Information announced that major layoffs would occur in

the aircraft industry, the IAM Grand Lodge decided to take a survey of its lodges, asking for information on the effects of job cutbacks. The national leaders hoped to help firms with Machinist lodges obtain other contracts or receive permission to produce civilian materials, which obviously would help members retain employment. In September 1944 Lodge 776 received word that top CVAC officials pledged that they would continue production into 1946, and in November local CVAC management announced that the Army Air Force promised that the production of heavy bombers would not decrease after the war. Though this information gave the union optimism that it would not be hit as hard by the end of hostilities, there was still no guarantee that many local members would not lose their jobs. The union also feared that when cuts did come the company would get rid of experienced union workers and keep hundreds of the new employees they continued to hire.<sup>123</sup>

The war in Europe ended in early May, and later that month the job cutbacks began in large numbers as the Army reduced its orders for bombers. CVAC employment level was at 20,000 before the losses came. By the first week in June, over 5,000 employees lost their jobs, and thousands more were expected until by fall the workforce would be reduced to 10,000. The union cooperated with the company, the War Production Board, and the War Manpower Commission (WMC) in handling the layoffs. Job cuts were determined according to seniority with group committeemen working with

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<sup>123</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 31 March 1944, 8 September 1944, 24 November 1944, and 13 April 1945; Brown to all Business Agents, 11 August 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 21;

supervisors to decide who should be let go. A small number of the laid-off employees expected to return to CVAC after postwar production of commercial aircraft picked up. Most of the workers, though, faced the prospect of having to find other work in Fort Worth or leave town. Union officials repeated local WMC Chairman James Ellis's claim that most workers would find work in the area, mostly in contract shops that had been preparing for postwar business. They recommended that workers stop by the union offices for referrals to other shops in the Fort Worth area that were hiring since they had contacts and connections with them. Smith observed that because similar retrenchments were occurring throughout the Southwest so workers should not leave expecting easily to find work elsewhere. He suggested they wait until reconversion began in earnest, which would bring industrial expansion and more jobs to the area. Although the union claimed that the layoffs were only causing temporary dislocation for most workers since they had found work elsewhere, the situation was probably not quite so harmless. The local U. S. Employment Service manager, Alma Herndon, reported that 35 to 40 percent of CVAC workers left to go back to their former homes or to find jobs elsewhere. She also announced that about 65 percent had found jobs or applied for work in Fort Worth, so most laid-off CVAC employees probably did not find work. Most union members may have done so, however, as the union gave them priority in helping workers find jobs in

other businesses. Those workers who could not find work could receive unemployment compensation so they were not left destitute.<sup>124</sup>

The union's prediction that the company would violate seniority rules in layoffs proved accurate. Most workers were terminated through proper procedures, but in some departments this was not the case. Workers filed over two hundred grievances by 8 June, many of which were eventually adjusted and with workers brought back to work. The union expected mistakes to occur, but some violations appeared to be deliberate. When the union and the company bargained over the contract, the union wanted department level seniority rules. The company objected and claimed this would impede the transfer of employees to other departments to increase production or improve efficiency. The WLB ruled in favor of the company and ordered plant-wide seniority in the contract. In the recent layoffs the union charged department heads with using both types of seniority rules, using whichever one best suited their interests, or with not using any seniority principles whatsoever. Due to the large number of layoffs, the union could not forcefully challenge this as it was occurring, but it took action shortly thereafter.<sup>125</sup>

In mid-June, Lodge 776 filed a general non-compliance grievance against CVAC over the violations. In the middle of July, the union also decided to file a petition with the Regional NLRB for a strike vote due to several complaints that had not been resolved. The first was the company's failure to follow the seniority rules of the contract, especially

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<sup>124</sup> *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 26 May 1945, 27 May 1945, and 9 June 1945; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 1 June 1945 and 8 June 1945.

<sup>125</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 8 June 1945 and 22 June 1945.

in the previous round of layoffs. The union also charged the company with violating the contract by replacing some production and maintenance workers with supervisory personnel, failure to properly handle hours and rates grievances, and not following through with six month merit reviews that the NWLB ordered to be included in the contract.<sup>126</sup>

During the thirty-day waiting period, union officers felt some pressure from below to settle the problems. In Lodge 776-A and 776-B elections, several officers were voted out in 776-A, and a new set of officers were elected in 776-B largely due to dissatisfaction over the buildup of grievances and the problems with layoffs and shifting of workers. At well-attended meetings the membership also voiced strong complaints against the company. District Lodge officers were aware that workers' pent-up frustrations from years of management treating them unfairly could boil over into strikes, which began to grow in the Southwest and the rest of the nation after V-E Day. They also shared the workers' frustrations with government agencies' slow process in settling disputes. And the union suspected that as the war came to an end, companies would begin to comply less with the contract to test the strength of the unions and the degree of support they had among their workforce. But union officials were also aware that government officials viewed the rising turbulence as symptomatic of weak union officers

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 22 June 1945 and 20 July 1945.



unable to control their rank and file and of workers who were losing their spirit of patriotism for self-interest.<sup>127</sup>

Given these pressures, and that the end to the war with Japan was still uncertain, union officers decided not to follow through with the strike. Beginning in the middle of July, conciliator Roy Major met with representatives from CVAC and the IAM to discuss the complaints and try to arrange a settlement. In the first week of August, the IAM called off the strike vote set for 11 August after Smith and Lindsey met with RWLB director Elliot and CVAC's Hassler. They decided to continue to process the complaints through the regular grievance procedures and to begin to negotiate a new contract. The old one was set to expire on 25 August, but both sides agreed it would remain in force until a new contract was worked out. This was hardly a victory for the union, but it did provide evidence to CVAC management that the union, with strong backing from vocal elements in the rank and file, could disrupt operations through strike actions when the time and circumstances were more auspicious. But the company could also interpret the union's actions as just another idle threat. Management certainly could have seen in the previous events that the union lacked adequate support among the workforce to take serious actions against the company. Based on their own perspective, both sides believed they held the edge going into bargaining talks.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 27 July 1945, 6 July 1945, and 10 August 1945.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 20 July 1945, 3 August 1945, and 10 August 1945; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 5 August 1945 and 6 August 1945.

Before negotiations could begin, the war with Japan came to a sudden end, and a second wave of massive layoffs ensued. The military canceled more of its contracts, and CVAC terminated half its workforce by 17 August. The company organized the remaining five or six thousand into one forty-hour-week shift. Union officers and committeemen once more worked to help former employees find new work and to ensure the layoffs were done according to the seniority rules. They again told the workers that when postwar production picked up at CVAC and other industries in the Fort Worth area, many of them should find work. The company violated the seniority rule enough times for the union to bring another grievance against the company in September. This time they requested a joint review board to determine whether or not the company followed the correct procedure.<sup>129</sup>

Just as the union was confronting the company over layoff complaints, the negotiations over the new contract broke down. Throughout the fall of 1945 strikes exploded across Texas and the rest of the country as many businesses closed or downsized and unemployment soared. These workers and their unions tried to gain greater employment security and higher wages in the face of corporate and government resistance. District Lodge 776 faced these same forces when contract talks began 26 September. The union contract committee proposed to the company at least a 30 percent wage increase to make the take-home pay with a shorter work week on par with incomes during the war which had included overtime pay. The union also demanded a union shop

and clarification changes on the grievance procedure. It became clear fairly early in the talks that CVAC wanted to eliminate some of the union-friendly clauses in the contract that it had contested with the NWLB.<sup>130</sup>

After about a week with their previous complaints still not remedied—layoff violations, classification problems, bringing in outside workers to undermine the union—and the company not even close to submitting to the union proposals, some rank-and-file members quickly planned a confrontation. During a Lodge meeting on Monday 1 October, union officials warned the members to follow the law, so they voted by a near consensus to order the officers to petition for a strike vote. The union had heard rumors that some people in management were not worried about the negotiations because they believed the union would not strike. By the next day the patience of some members had disappeared. Unwilling to wait thirty days, they organized a picket line around the CVAC plant entrance on Wednesday morning. Some strikers held signs saying: “We Want Jobs For Fort Worth.” One unionist exclaimed, “We decided to show them that we Texans are not docile slaves.” About two hundred men and women formed the picket and shut down the plant by not allowing production workers into the plant, although they did allow in firemen, plant safety workers, Army personnel, switchboard operators and others. Although union officers told company officials and reporters that the strike was not authorized by the international or the local union, the union paper continued to report on

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<sup>129</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts* 17 August 1945, 24 August 1945, and 21 September 1945.

the strikers in a very favorable light. The strikers continued to hold meetings to discuss strategy and to decide whether to continue the strike.<sup>131</sup>

The wildcat strike lasted for less than a week, and the action occurred without a major incident. Some people in the picket line encountered minor trouble with the state police when they attempted to block workers from entering the gate. At this time the District Lodge claimed to have about 2,400 members. The union claimed very few workers crossed the line the first day, but shortly after over half the workforce of about six thousand returned to work. Still, production nearly ground to a halt. The company attacked the strikers for violating the contract and the Smith-Connally Act, and it was correct on these points. The union countered that the company had broken the law first by refusing to bargain in good faith, and that the workers took whatever means they had available to them to put pressure on CVAC to engage in constructive bargaining. But with the war over and strikes sprouting up seemingly everywhere, the federal government did not have the ability, nor did it face the same kind of pressure, to enforce the law as it had during the war.<sup>132</sup>

On Monday 8 October, both sides agreed to reopen negotiations, and union members voted to call off the picket line and return to work. A conciliator from the Department of Labor worked to get both sides talking again, although the company would

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 28 September 1945, 5 October 1945, and 12 October 1945; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 13 June 1945, 18 October 1945, 30 October 1945, and 21 February 1946.

<sup>131</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 5 October 1945; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 3 October 1945.

not agree to his sitting in on the negotiations as the union had requested. Still, IAM representatives reported a definite change in attitude by company negotiators, and after a week they were able to agree to changes in the grievance procedure and seniority rules that favored the union. Still unable to agree on the crucial issues of wages and union security, both sides agreed to keep the other parts of the old contract in force until January when talks would resume. They chose January because by then they hoped that the national Industry-Labor Conference promoted by President Harry Truman would set the guidelines for postwar labor relations. With the wartime controls loosened, the union membership won the first battle in the postwar struggle. The union claimed it had upheld the right to bargain collectively, and it showed that workers would stand together and struggle for a decent income. The union paper emphasized the importance of the action by stating “ . . . and above all, employees of CVAC upheld the dignity of Texas wage earners. They demonstrated that Texans will fight, and fight some more, for themselves, their families, and their city and state.”<sup>133</sup>

The union faced a major challenge as the negotiations faltered again in January. The Industry-Labor Conference produced only the vaguest of guidelines for postwar labor relations, something not altogether unexpected given the still great hostility most employers had toward unions. It was unlikely that CVAC would have backed down in any case. When negotiations opened again on 16 January, the company still refused to

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 4 October 1945, 5 October 1945, and 8 October 1945; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 12 October 1945.

accept a union security measure and higher wages. On 27 January the union members voted overwhelmingly to authorize union leaders to petition for a strike. Regional NLRB director Elliot claimed the agency had no funds to conduct a strike vote, so he said the petition would serve notice that the union would strike in thirty days.<sup>134</sup>

The strike began on 25 February and lasted until 23 May with talks occurring sporadically throughout. Years later the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported that during those months “a pitched battle between pickets and persons still working in the plant, dynamite explosions in residential areas and the arrival of Texas Rangers punctuated a series of disorderly events.” CVAC officials told the union that they never agreed to certain parts of the contract that the NWLB had forced upon them, and they refused to bargain over those issues. The union hoped that the war years would have demonstrated to CVAC that they could still do well as a business with the union and a solid contract in place. But the company had good reason to test the mettle of the union because CVAC officials were risking a long-term reduction in profits and managerial control over the workforce. The ability of the union to hold enough members on strike forced the company to compromise with the union. CVAC accepted a fifteen percent wage increase, with the approval of the government, and a maintenance of membership provision. Although the settlement was not as strong as the union wanted, it was still a victory for

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 12 October 1945; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 8 October 1945 and 11 October 1945.

<sup>134</sup> E. P. Fortner notes, D. L. 776 Negotiations Committee, 14 March 1946, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 13; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 28 January 1946 and 30 October 1949.

the union. A short strike occurred in the spring of 1947 as the two sides negotiated a new contract, but by this time the union had proved it would stand its ground and withstand the resistance of the company.<sup>135</sup>

The periods of massive layoffs and collective bargaining over a new contract after the war proved to be decisive moments in the history of District Lodge 776. The layoffs may have actually strengthened the union by leaving the most experienced and committed members, and those employees with crucial skills at critical points in the productions process, on the shop floor. Going into negotiations, both the company and the union were willing to battle hard for their sides, and the circumstances and constraints which both worked under had changed. The company tried to roll back gains by the union, while the union tried to improve the contract further. After a short wildcat strike in October 1945 and a long, officially sanctioned strike in the first half of 1946, the union forced major concessions from the company. Although the union did not get everything it wanted, it showed that it could rely on its own membership to secure beneficial results in a conflict with CVAC, and that it did not have to rely on government intervention to do so. With the government less willing and able to force workers to remain on the job, circumstances had changed, and so did the unions tactics. Heavy government involvement in labor relations during the war allowed District Lodge 776 to mature into a strong local union. Its contract victory in May 1946 demonstrated that the union had developed a strong

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<sup>135</sup> E. P. Fortner notes, D. L. 776 Negotiations Committee, 14 March 1946, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 13; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 30 October 1949

internal organization that could exercise independent power to enforce its will. Union leaders understood the important role the government played in establishing the union's power base. Still, they believed that the core of a union's power and strength was its leadership and rank-and-file activism. But the Machinists also realized that ignoring the state only meant peril.

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(quotation); *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 1 February 1946. *Labor News*, 24 May 1946. *Cowtown Plane Facts* changed to *Labor News* on 10 May.



## CHAPTER 7

### POLITICS AND POLITICAL ACTION DURING THE WAR

Previous chapters have addressed how District Lodge 776 reacted to government controls over labor. As most unionists throughout the country had accepted during the war, if not before, local IAM leaders believed that government regulation of the economy was necessary in a modern industrial country such as the United States. But questions remained about the form and extent of government regulation, and about the role of labor in the political realm. This chapter discusses explicitly how the union reacted to government involvement in labor relations and other areas of concern to working-class people during the war, what kind of treatment they expected to receive from the government, and how they intended to achieve these results.

Throughout the war District Lodge 776 revealed its political beliefs mostly through its paper, *Cowtown Plane Facts*. The union believed the time for strong political action by labor was long overdue. Big business had participated in politics for decades and decades while organized labor made only limited efforts to influence the political arena. Workers could effectively harness their political power by actively supporting labor's friends and its goal of moving toward economic justice. Although the IAM had an official policy of non-partisan politics, supporting candidates who were the most favorable to unions almost always meant supporting Democrats. In the near one-party

South, this meant supporting Democrats who were closest to being liberal. While the union thought it might be necessary one day for organized labor to create a labor party, it believed that the conditions in the U. S. allowed them to use the Democratic party to exert labor's political power.<sup>136</sup>

The Machinists supported FDR and the liberal policies and legislation that had been enacted during his years in office, such as the NLRA, minimum wage and maximum hours legislation, unemployment compensation, and social security. They also hoped that these types of programs would be strengthened and expanded in the years to come. Popular support for liberal Democrats and their ideas demonstrated to them that common people were awakening to the fact that their difficult circumstances were due to deliberate exploitation by corporations, which was allowed and supported by their lackey legislators in Congress. One *CPF* article dramatically proclaimed,

When the giant of commoners, their hands tied with greedy fetters,  
and watching the giant wolf of want creep nearer and nearer to those  
they love, cries out in agony: unhand me, so I may shield my home  
from hunger, ravages, and wretchedness, then the days of stooges in  
legislative halls are ending.

The lodge hoped unions would be one of the main institutions for getting workers greater access to information they needed to be politically aware and active.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 21 April 1944 and 25 May 1945; IAM Official Circular No. 414, 3 April 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2 folder 21.

<sup>137</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 19 May 1944, 20 April 1945, 1 December 1944, 14 July 1944, 12 May 1944, 13 October 1944, and 23 June 1944; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 1 March 1944, 26 January 1944, and 1 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

But the union was also aware of the continuing influence of big business in government and its attempts not only to stop advances in the liberal agenda but to eliminate some of them. It attacked corporations and their supporters for calling anything connected to improving people's lives "communist" and against the free enterprise system. District Lodge 776 itself did not shy away from hyperbole when it often characterized big business as fascist or fascist-minded. It feared that the ultimate goal of these businessmen was completely to destroy labor unions. As laborites were well aware, and as they forcefully reminded people, the economy in a fascist country was dominated by large industrialists and financiers, and one of the first targets of fascist repression were trade unionists. Lodge 776 claimed that since the early 1900s large corporations had been distributing information through organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers "to implant in the mind an ideology suitable to big business control." They reported that various fascist groups, with some of their members having gone to trial for sedition, had received financial support from big business. The unionists expressed a concern that fascism could arise in the United States and that the best way to thwart this development was to join and support labor unions. Although this rhetoric had propagandistic elements, they also genuinely believed it. In retrospect, the unionists clearly overestimated the potential threat of domestic fascism. Still, the threat of authoritarian rule was ever present in the minds of many people living through the great upheavals of depression and war during the 1930s and 1940s. In addition, their beliefs can be better understood when considering that the rhetoric and actions of some

businessmen and politicians at the time certainly did not put them very far away from being fascists. These ideas also had the benefit of appealing to both conservative- and liberal-minded people who saw dangers in the increasing concentration of economic power.<sup>138</sup>

For the unionists, the choice was between letting the free enterprise system continue to run the economy in a way that produced low incomes and poverty, or for the people, through their government, to ensure that industries are run for the general public good. During the war the government had set up agencies and programs that, although not truly run for the public welfare, approximated some of the demands of unionists. The clearest example was the National War Labor Board, whose purpose was to stabilize labor relations and grant unions a degree of recognition and rights they previously lacked. But as has been discussed earlier, many unionists in Lodge 776 and across the country held an ambivalent attitude toward the Board. To labor leaders the public members often acted like they were representatives of business. For example, unionists were not satisfied with its action on wages. The NWLB was greatly restricted by government policy on the amount of wage increases it could authorize and the unionists resented this. The union often supported strikers who had not found solutions to their problems against “unconscionable monopolies” through the Board. Lodge 776 tried to emphasize that these strikes were not against the government or the war effort but rather against the companies

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<sup>138</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 23 June 1944, 14 April 1944, 26 January 1945, 2 June 1944, and 7 April 1944; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 17 March 1944 and 26 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

who, while compiling record-level profits through government guaranteed contracts, failed to provide workers with decent wages and working conditions. They also recognized that without the government protections American unions and workers would be in a much worse position. They understood the fight to gain a contract and enforce its provisions would have been much harder, if not impossible, for themselves and other unions without the NWLB. What the Machinists disagreed with then was not the type of regulation the government created but rather with some of the Board's specific decisions and actions that were unfavorable to labor. District Lodge 776 showed no signs of considerable opposition to the institution through the war years.<sup>139</sup>

Other government regulations over prices, manpower, and political activity provoked heated responses but again no overt opposition to the government's efforts. The Lodge viewed the Office of Price Administration as necessary to help keep prices down and enforce price guidelines on businesses, but it also thought that the OPA allowed prices to be set too high. It harshly attacked those politicians, such as Congressman Fritz Lanham of Fort Worth, who opposed greater federal subsidies on items that would have reduced the cost of consumer goods.<sup>140</sup>

Manpower control measures also provoked a response by the union. The restrictions imposed by Executive Order 9328 on workers' mobility in finding other jobs

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<sup>139</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 18 August 1944, 14 January 1944, 10 March 1944, 24 March 1944, and 4 May 1945; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 11 January 1944 and 19 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

<sup>140</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 7 April 1944 and 31 August 1945; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 1 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

caused complaints by numerous employees at CVAC. To these kinds of restrictions union officials tried to accept them as a necessary evil during a war emergency, and they declared that workers needed to join the union to ensure that good working conditions would prevail. When labor conscription laws were seriously considered, the union took a more antagonistic stand. If the government put greater control over wealth and capital concurrently with conscription of labor, then the situation would be tolerable according to the union. Barring this, the union proposed that the agencies that dealt with manpower do a better job directing available workers to plants in need of employees, and for them to force employers to stop firing workers over the slightest of problems and improperly using workers in their plants. Waste of manpower by companies was already great according to Senate investigating committees, and the unionists predicted that this would only worsen with a labor draft.<sup>141</sup>

The restriction on organized labor's contributions to political campaigns in the Smith-Connally Act alarmed the union. It saw Smith-Connally as another attempt by the "pawns of Industrial Royalists" to reduce the growing political might of unions while big business continued to have unrestricted rights. Corporations contributed many millions to their political supporters and used this power to sway politicians to their point of view. The union saw political contributions as one of the most important means of augmenting labor's influence by helping to elect people who acted fairly toward labor. They saw it as

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<sup>141</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 19 January 1944 and 23 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; Brown to D. L. 776, 13 May 1943, 14 May 1943, and 30 June 1943,

just one more step by fascist-minded people to make the populace subservient to organized capital.<sup>142</sup>

The union hoped to change the decisions of the agencies and politicians through pressure exerted on them by union representatives at the local level and by those in the international headquarters in Washington, D. C. at the federal level. It believed that unions would have greater leverage if more people joined the unions and supported them, so the issues of greater political influence and increasing union membership were intertwined. They also hoped to influence these agencies and government policies through political work such as supporting labor-friendly Democrats and promoting their ideas to the rank and file and others in their community, mostly through the distribution of their paper.<sup>143</sup>

Much of the commentary and analysis in the union literature on national and state politics was filled with denunciations of the domination by corporations. One story in the *Aircraft Bulletin* declared that Texas state and national political representatives were “satraps and stooges of predatory interests, and are men who are baiting and sniping at workers and labor organizations.” The union noted the hypocritical stand most Texas politicians took on state’s rights issues. When a particular federal law served their interests, such as the Smith-Connally bill, they supported it. When a law did not and favored working-class people, then they often opposed it, claiming the new measure

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UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 13; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 26 January 1945, 12 January 1945, and 9 February 1945.

<sup>142</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 19 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

would violate their state's rights. The Machinists also reported on politics in the state legislature and attacked those politicians who failed to support such laws as an income tax, increase in unemployment compensation, public works expenditures, minimum wage and maximum hours requirements, and other measures that would benefit the common people in Texas. They berated the efforts of conservative Democrats who worked to stem the tide of growing labor and liberal influence in the state and local branches of the Democratic party.<sup>144</sup>

Some Machinists became involved in state and local political action organizations. The Texas State Joint Social and Legislative Council (TSJSLC) was formed in February 1944 by "farmers, industrial wage earners, representatives of the aged citizens and other progressive groups . . . for the purpose of uniting in political action for better social legislation and better representatives and representation for the citizens in the Texas and National Congress." The body pledged to work toward goals that would benefit the common people of Texas such as adequate pensions for the elderly, subsidies to farmers, elimination of the poll tax, and aid to veterans. One platform pledge boldly pronounced that "this organization lend itself to the proposition that every person in the State of Texas, regardless of race, color, or creed, shall have equal education and economic opportunities, and every human being within the state shall enjoy an American standard of living." *Plane Facts* editor Frank Gauthier was elected Secretary-Treasurer of

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<sup>143</sup> Perlman, *The Machinists*, 108, 117, 125-27, 270-75.



the organization in the fall of 1944. He and other members helped outline a lobbying agenda for the Texas legislative session that began in early 1945.<sup>145</sup>

Another political organization local Machinists became involved with was the Tarrant County Labor Congress (TCLC). Created by local labor leaders in early 1944, the organization was dedicated to supporting pro-labor legislation and educating the public on the rights of labor. They had similar goals as the TSJSLC, which they affiliated with in the fall of 1944. TCLC endorsed Lodge 776's paper, and *Plane Facts* became the official paper of the Labor Congress in early 1945. TCLC also worked on local political campaigns and projects and in April 1945 expanded their membership to include "all wage earners, organized agricultural workers, organized educational groups, and others having the same objective . . . ."<sup>146</sup>

There were several anti-union laws in Texas with which the union had to contend. The first one passed in 1941 and put restrictions on picketing. It stated that the use or threat of violence at a picket line was unlawful. In essence the content of the law was already an established precedent in the American judicial system. The law was probably passed to send a message to unionists in the midst of expanding industry and unions in Texas. Since the union never officially had a strike during the war, it was not until after

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<sup>144</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 5 January 1944 and 17 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 9 June 1944, 23 June 1944, 26 January 1945, 6 September 1945, 23 February 1945, 30 March 1945, and 26 May 1944.

<sup>145</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 2 March 1944, 1 September 1944, 27 October 1944, and 12 January 1945.

the war in the 1946 strike that violence broke out on the picket lines and the union faced legal trouble due to it.<sup>147</sup>

Of more immediate concern to Lodge 776 during the war years was the Manford Act of 1943, which was directed at CIO and other newer industrial unions like IAM Lodge 776. Among the terms it imposed were registration of all union organizers with the secretary of state, mandatory filing of financial statements, prohibition of unreasonable initiation fees, and prohibition of campaign contributions. Although the State AFL had considered not complying with the law in protest, it instead decided to challenge the act in the courts. The Machinists complied with the law but believed it was intended to disrupt the activities of unions and their organizers. During court hearings in 1944, state and federal courts struck down the licensing and initiation fee rules among other provisions, but the filing of financial statements and the political campaign restrictions remained.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 21 July 1944, 24 November 1944, 9 February 1945, 30 March 1945, 13 April 1945, 11 May 1945, 23 May 1945, 15 June 1945, 10 August 1945, and 27 April 1945.

<sup>147</sup> Sanford Cohen, *State Labor Legislation, 1937-1947: A Study of State Laws Affecting the Conduct and Organization of Labor Unions* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1948), 23, 133; Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 242; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April to May 1946.

<sup>148</sup> Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 243-44; Texas Secretary of State Sidney Latham, "Policies of State Department—Administration of House Bill 100, 48<sup>th</sup> Legislature (labor bill), UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 5; Brown to D. L. 776, 3 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, 3 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 10; Sodd to Office of Secretary of State, 18 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 10; Brown to Texas State AFL President Harry Acreman, 19 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 10; Sodd to Office of Secretary of State, 26 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 4, folder 5; Davison

Toward the end of the war, Texas unions faced a serious challenge in the attempt to pass a bill which would have outlawed the closed and union shop. The supporters called it a “right-to-work” or “freedom-to-work” measure on the reasoning that unions discriminated against non-members and restricted these people’s abilities to find employment. The Machinists contended that union shops did not prevent anyone from working, rather they held workers responsible to support efforts to preserve the benefits that come to wage earners as a result of the union. The real purposes of the measure, the union claimed, were to destroy unions as an effective force in Texas and to keep the state a cheap source of labor. The bill died in the House as the short Texas legislative session ended in June 1945 before the act could be passed. The Machinists claimed that the bill failed to gain support due to the pressure from labor, farm, and progressive groups such as the TSJSLC who lobbied against it. *Plane Facts* quoted an unnamed labor leader as commenting: “House Bill 12 [the right-to-work bill] was defeated by the realization of the people that the forces behind it were phony, fascist, and subversive.” Such an abiding faith in the democratic process was common in the sentiments and analysis of the union leaders. They usually credited popular democratic forces for the defeat of other anti-working class legislation or the success of pro-labor measures. They also tended to blame the lack of popular pressure or concern when pro-corporate measures passed. Overall

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to Sodd, 20 January 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 3, folder 6; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 4 January 1944 and 13 April 1945.

union leaders displayed a great amount of optimism about the people's ability to create a better future for America.<sup>149</sup>

The union leaders hoped that America's working class would continue to build a strong labor movement. Working people, who the union officials often referred to as the "commoners," needed to cooperate and act collectively to solve the nations economic and other problems. Unemployment, underemployment, and substandard living and working conditions prevailed through much of America's industrializing years, and these conditions had worsened considerably during the Great Depression. Their goal of remedying these social ills was not based on some benign or crass materialism. It was founded on the ideals of democracy and freedom. In an editorial, Gauthier wrote

We march on. Although sometimes strange moods fill our minds, our march towards security and peace is the march of freedom, and one that we would like to become a living part. But we are not really free unless we use what we produce, and produce all that we need so far as our productivity permits. So long as the fruits of our labor is denied us, just so long will want be the lot of us, and want manifest itself in a world of slaves. It is only when we have plenty to eat, and plenty of all the necessities of life, with reasonable recreation and entertainment, that we will have freedom. Under such conditions we will understand what freedom means. When we have enough to eat, then we are healthy enough to enjoy what we eat. Then we have time and ability to read, think and discuss things. Then we are not only living, but also are a creative part of life. It is then that we become a growing part of democracy.<sup>150</sup>

The root cause of the problems workers faced, according to the union, was the domination of the economy and politics by corporations. The vast improvement in

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 10 November 1944, 26 January 1945, 9 February 1945, 8 June 1945, and 22 June 1945.

<sup>150</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 14 January 1944, 27 July 1945, and 14 April 1944.

production in previous decades and the performance of industry during the war proved that the United States could have an economy of abundance. Through union and political activism, working people could strip corporations of their power and organize society so that all people could share in the benefits of the modern economy. Organized labor could lay the groundwork for providing full employment, a good standard of living, higher incomes, less burdensome toil, and freedom and democracy for all Americans.<sup>151</sup>

The union used moral and religious issues to support their ideals. *Plane Facts* periodically quoted religious leaders who preached that Christians should not countenance an inequitable system like that of the United States. The union claimed that its principles were based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. For example, the opposition to exploitation symbolized in Christ chasing the money changers out of the temple was a basic objective of organized labor. In fact, in their literature the union occasionally referred to leaders in the labor movement as “God’s noblemen.” Morality also infused the unions notion of responsibility that workers had toward their participation in achieving labor’s goals. The need for solidarity among workers was not only a practical means for empowering workers. Solidarity was also a moral imperative. Workers needed to support and contribute to that from which it benefited.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 8 March 1944, 17 March 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 7 July 1944, 12 January 1945, and 28 July 1944.

<sup>152</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 27 January 1944, 18 August 1944, 22 December 1944, and 30 January 1944; *Aircraft Bulletin*, 5 January 1944 and 1 February 1944, UTASC, AR 48, box 2, folder 19.

The Machinists dismissed attacks by big business and others that the labor movement was trying to drag the country toward socialism or communism. It argued that American workers were not influenced by these doctrines. What needed to be replaced was the so-called 'free enterprise' system that had brought the country to ruin under Hoover. The New Deal began the transformation to a system where business joined with workers and farmers, and through the government, regulated the economy to ensure the country's well-being. The union emphasized certain measures that needed to be included in the postwar order. In addition to extending some of the New Deal programs and protecting workers' rights to organize unions, they promoted ideas such as a thirty-hour workweek, a full employment program with the government guaranteeing a job with decent wages to every able-bodied man and woman who wanted to work, and a guaranteed annual income. Through 1944 the union had stressed the importance of labor-management committees for improving coordination and planning of the workplace and production. Although it probably did not give up on these ideas, the union did not push this proposal for postwar industries.<sup>153</sup>

The recent war demonstrated to the unionists the urgency of fully implementing this new system. Victory over fascism came at a great cost and was made possible only by the Herculean efforts of the people in the Allied countries. But the war effort was necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of everyone. The Machinists believed that

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<sup>153</sup> *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 14 July 1944, 5 January 1945, 31 August 1945, 28 April 1944, 14 April 1944, 9 February 1945, 2 September 1945, 25 May 1945, 12 January 1945, 22 June 1945, 20 October 1944, and 6 October 1944.

the fascists served as an example of what could happen when democracy was kept from people and when totalitarianism was not fought at every step at home and abroad. Lodge 776 applauded labor party victories in European elections after the war as part of a left-wing trend in European politics and a sign that the people there wanted to get rid of the old order of imperialism and societies of rich and poor that had caused the war. It later criticized the actions of Great Britain and the United States for setting up client states in Europe with the justification of opposing the Soviet Union. The union leaders did not view the Soviets, or any socialist state, as an inherent evil, and they defended the Soviet people in their right of self-government. They commended the basic principles that the Soviet system was founded upon—political and economic equality, and protection of the right to work, the right to obtain an education, the right to be free from racial discrimination, and other rights.<sup>154</sup> The Machinists also supported the creation of the United Nations as a new international organization designed to preserve world-wide peace, and it hoped the growing conflict between the West and the Soviets would not disrupt this trend. Importantly, though, they fundamentally believed that peace could be maintained not only by reacting to totalitarianism but also by eliminating the conditions that bred war—deprivation and exploitation caused by greed.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Although the union here displayed its ignorance of the undemocratic nature of the Soviet system, this ignorance can be understood by the lack of information about the Soviet Union in the West and the distrust the unionists had toward Soviet critics in the media, government, and elsewhere who seemed to be mouthpieces for big business.

<sup>155</sup> *Aircraft Bulletin*, 22 December 1943, UTASC, AR 48, box 1, folder 11; *Cowtown Plane Facts*, 18 May 1945, 24 August 1945, 3 August 1945, 14 December 1944, and 29 June 1945.

The union advocated heavy involvement in politics by labor. They supported liberal policies of social welfare legislation and economic regulatory mechanisms. The unionists believed the corporate hold over American politics and government had to be broken, that working people needed to use the government to ensure that economic prosperity benefited everyone, and that the economy was run for the public good and not merely for a privileged and wealthy elite. Although Lodge 776 disagreed with some of the specific uses of government regulatory powers during the war, it generally favored the type of regulation that existed—over labor relations, prices, and production. The Machinists advocated political action at the national, state, and local level through unions and political activist groups. It supported politicians most favorable to unions. Union leaders promoted and lobbied for liberal or progressive legislation and policies and against antilabor or antiworking-class measures; and they circulated and promoted distributing information to working-class people to allow them to become politically active or at least politically knowledgeable.



## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

From the outset, this thesis has had three overriding goals in exploring the history of IAM District Lodge 776 during WWII. One was to demonstrate that the Machinists union in Fort Worth clearly fit into the overall historical pattern of the national labor movement during the war. The first chapter provided a context for understanding the history of a local union and also described developments at the national level with which the experiences of District Lodge 776 could be compared. The similarities of circumstances and experiences between Fort Worth Machinists and other unions across the country are summarized best by concurrently discussing the second major explanatory idea of the thesis—that changes in the ideas and practices of businessmen, politicians and government officials, and union leaders during the war were the prime determining factors in labor's successes and failures.

The conditions that favored union expansion were from the war-induced industrial resurgence, economic expansion, and altered political forces. Furthermore, many local unions relied on the influence and experience of national unions to get started and for continued support. District Lodge 776 plainly fits into this pattern. CVAC located a plant in Fort Worth due to its government contracts. Furthermore, IAM members who had worked in CVAC's San Diego plant and were transferred to Fort Worth, along with help

from officials from the national IAM, founded District Lodge 776. Initially, therefore, the creation of a modern industry in Fort Worth, along with the formation of a modern industrial labor force with an affiliated local union of a powerful international industrial union that gave that labor force greater strength and security and which provided progressive ideas, goals, and actions, stemmed from outside forces. Also, the union's ability to receive recognition from CVAC, and the company's agreeing to negotiate, to bargain collectively, and to form other relations with the union were greatly reinforced by, and perhaps relied on as the primary factor for establishing those relations, government agencies such as the NLRB and the NWLB.

The changed conditions during the war still did not alter the basic response of business owners and management toward labor's organizing efforts. The business community continued to accept union advances only when forced by unionists, by the government, or by both. In the face of such resistance, union officials and rank-and-file members attempts to solidify and strengthen their union's membership base and economic power resulted in mounting conflicts between labor and management. Again, the experiences of District Lodge 776 bear out these trends. CVAC management in Fort Worth consistently resisted and obstructed union activities. This was at times a deliberate strategy. In some instances it resulted from individual action by management personnel against official company policy—although this, too, may have been part of CVAC's unofficial agenda. The activities that the union concentrated on, and which the company tried to thwart with varying degrees, were establishing a bargaining relationship with the

company, reaching a bargaining agreement, implementing a contract that ensured a certain level of wages, hours, and working conditions, establishing a presence on the shop floor, enforcing these arrangements and ensuring fairness on the job for CVAC employees, educating workers about unions and other matters, and gaining more members and support.

Union officials sought ways to reach their goals and satisfy their membership or potential membership despite the company's obstruction. The rank-and-file members encountered numerous difficulties. Their complaints centered around unfair treatment by management, poor wages or lack of promotions to better paid jobs with resistance by management to make improvements, grievances not settled or adequately addressed, harassment and wrongful firings, seniority, layoffs, vacation time and pay, workplace safety, and antiunion action by management. They directed blame for these problems at the company and sometimes at the union. Very similar kinds of management resistance and union problems occurred at other unionized workplaces around the country.

In the context of wartime conditions and constraints, union officials relied on the government for protection and support early on, and this dependence deepened as the war progressed. This relationship had its drawbacks, and workers often took matters into their own hands by threatening to strike, or through wildcat strikes or other shop-floor actions, to try to remedy objectionable conditions that the government ignored, neglected, or otherwise failed to address to the satisfaction of the workers involved. In some areas of the country, although only a few, these actions verged on open dissent against the

government. Most union leaders, though, believed they had more to lose by engaging in such unauthorized actions, and instead they remained committed to orderly industrial jurisprudence and government intervention.

Labor also increased its level of political activism hoping to receive better treatment from the government, not only in its labor relations policies, but also in a whole range of political programs that affected the working class. District Lodge 776 was no exception to these trends. The Machinists displayed an ambivalent attitude toward government regulation of labor relations. They conceded that some benefits, such as acquiring a decent contract and settling grievances, would have been much more difficult to obtain without government involvement. But they thought some reasonable demands had not been met, such as a quick settlement of the contract and higher wages. Under pressure from the rank and file, union officers threatened to use the strike weapon. They did not use this method, however, for fear of government penalties, until after the war ended. The union finally did strike, unofficially in the fall of 1945 and officially in the spring of 1946, due to ongoing resistance by the company to union demands during the transition from war production to peacetime production. Overall, the situation at CVAC's Fort Worth plant did not create overwhelming discontent or dissent as had occurred at some workplaces during the war, and only a few short-lived wildcat strikes broke out involving a very small number of employees. District Lodge leaders became increasingly involved in local and state politics to ensure fairer treatment from the government with regard to union and working-class concerns.

Finally, this thesis has demonstrated that the success of District Lodge 776 ultimately depended on the work of the local unionists. The discussion in chapter 5 of the postwar strikes—a brief foray into the postwar labor movement—was intended to underscore this point. Union officers and rank-and-file members built a union that brought higher wages and fairer treatment at work, and provided CVAC employees and other workers with a stronger voice in local and state politics. Local unionists also expressed a set of beliefs about the American economy, politics, and society that gave meaning to their work. They believed, and hoped to convince other workers to believe, that unions were the primary force through which Americans could progress toward greater democracy, equality, and freedom for all.

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